micro Adventurer

The computer strategy and simulation magazine

February 1985 75p

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BBC adventures

Hitch-Hiker's Guide

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HAVE AN ADVENTURE THIS CHRISTMAS WITH LEVEL 9
"The appearance of a new program from Level 9 is a flag-day for all aspiring adventures and, in my household, a signal for the cat to hide under the bed for the duration against the inevitable moment when I go rampaging through the flat, a wild look in my eyes muttering ferociously about bricklaying birds nudist beaches and the like. Since Return to Eden, the sequel to Snowball is out, the cat may be in hiding until Christmas.
You don't need to have played Snowball to get into the sequel as ever, there is ample documentation with the tape which in my Commodore 64 version (it is also on the Spectrum, Amstrad and BBC), is turbo-loaded. It starts with you, agent Kim Kimberly, having been framed for sabotaging the colonyship Snowball, in a crashed stratoglider on the planet Eden. For the moment your mission is to survive the misplaced retribution by your own people, but life gets very much more complicated than that. Solving these puzzles has nothing to do with luck, you either figure your way out of trouble on Eden or die there.
One major difference between this and former Level 9 efforts is that the Spectrum and C64 versions have graphics of a very high quality and can be switched off if required. The scope of the vocabulary appears unscathed by this addition.
Even experienced adventurers will probably get fried a few times by the avenging engines of the Snowball, before discovering how to take shelter. But, once that hurdle is passed, the real adventure begins, and it's a lulu. From the radioactive desert caused by the engine blast, you progress through a variety of hazards through some highly unlikely locations.
I haven't got to that point yet, and so far superhuman willpower has stopped me using the clue sheet provided, but I can't hold out very much longer since I am having what could be lethal communication problems with some robots. Terrific fun, but should carry a mental health warning."
Popular Computing Weekly 7 Nov 84
Return to Eden
Level 9 Computing
Snowball
Level 9 Computing
Lords of Time
Level 9 Computing
Colossal Adventure
Level 9 Computing
Adventure Quest
Level 9 Computing
Dungeon Adventure
Level 9 Computing
MERRY CHRISTMAS
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SUNSHINE

EDITORIAL

THE AMERICAN ADVENTURE market is showing signs of renewed activity. The Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, showcase for many of the coming year's hard and software products, featured a number of adventure and strategy games.

Imagic teamed up with book publisher Bantam House to publish a Sherlock Holmes adventure, *Another Bow*, under their joint *Living Literature* label. This idea of publishing adventures based on existing novels appears to be gaining in popularity, viz Imagic's adaptation of another classic H G Wells' *The Time Machine*. With Douglas Adams joining forces with Infocom to produce an adventure based on *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, we may be witnessing the birth of a new form of interactive fiction.

Imagic also displayed one of the few British programs to be exported to the US, *Macbeth*, written by Oxford Digital Enterprises and already released in the UK under the Creative Sparks banner.

Infocom, whose *Zork* trilogy has established it as one of the US's top adventure houses, launched *Suspect*. This is a computerised version of a 'Who dun it?' where you must prove the identity of a murderer, or be arrested in his place.

Other software houses with adventure offerings included Activision, Addison Wesley, Sierra On-Line and Broderbund.

Some of these adventures may be appearing in the UK quicker than usual. Ocean and Centresoft have formed a joint label, All American Adventures, to distribute American adventures in this country, starting with Sierra On-Line's *Exodus Ultima 3*.

LETTERS

Send your hints, successes, complaints and compliments to Letters Page, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2H 7PP

Bridging the gap

I DO NOT often see *Micro Adventurer* as my local newsagent is unable to get it. He says that his wholesaler does not handle it as there is 'no demand'.

However, I have recently been lent some copies and I am surprised to find that you give so little space to Tony Bridge.

This appears to be such a waste and the half page of 'Adventure Contact' often appears to be at odds with him as he answers some of the requests for help in his half page.

When Mr Gore was editor of *Popular Computing Weekly*, he gave Tony Bridge a whole page. Unless the publishers are afraid that too many people would change from *Popular Computing Weekly* to *Micro Adventurer* as a result, why don't you give Tony Bridge more space?

Under Mr Gore, *Popular Computing Weekly* invented the Adventure Help-line. He should now be very flattered by the way in which so many other magazines have imitated him. BUT . . . no one does it like Tony does . . .!

Only you have the Grand/Great (or whichever he happens to be at the moment) Elf . . . so USE him . . . (please)!

If you give Tony Bridge AT LEAST one whole page, I will take out a subscription.
Hugh Walker

ANY NEWSAGENT should be able to get almost any magazine for you — but not all are willing to put themselves out for their customers. If your local paper shop won't get you *Micro Adventurer*, then go somewhere else.

Wrong

AS A REGULAR reader of your normally excellent magazine, I should like to point out an unfortunate error in your January 1985 issue.

The Competition Corner puzzle (page 50) obviously assumes that zero is not divisible by any number exactly. In fact, the reverse is true! For instance, $0 \div 2 = 0$ remainder 0 so the division is exact.

I presume that your puzzle setter is using a 'subtraction' concept of division, but it seems a pity to cause confusion in your younger readers. I hope you will be able to clear up this point in a subsequent issue.
J R Ormond

WE STAND corrected. The zeros were meant to represent lamps with no numbers on at all.

Tick off

WHEN PRINTING competition entry forms, please ensure that there is only an advertisement on the reverse of the page; or, alternatively, give an option to send in entries on a photocopy. I would have liked to enter the *Legend* competition, but didn't because this would have involved cutting out half of a review.

Further to your enquiry in the December issue, I would also like to have binders for my copies of *Micro Adventurer*. I suggest black with the title in red and gold on the spine. Also, those flat plastic strips are best for holding the magazines, rather than metal rods or clips; although it's a bit more difficult to get the magazines in, the end result is neater.
J Grimwood

PHOTOCOPIES of entry forms are perfectly acceptable.

Wargames

BEING FIRSTLY a wargamer, both with miniatures and boardgames, I thought I must write to you in support of Ivor Benstead's review of Red Shift's *English Civil War*. While it seems to have the makings of a good game, it lacks what most wargamers need most — a readily available opponent.

Writing from my own experience, if I had an opponent available, I would opt for the old style miniatures or board game. This is because most computer wargames require both players to use the keyboard of the same micro. This is to my mind very boring. Not only are you not taking part in the game half the time, but you have to wait even longer if your opponent is a slow typer!

What we wargamers require is a game where two or more micros can do battle at the same time. Thus simultaneous movement and combat could take place, and the fog of war could be introduced.

The only game I've played that comes anywhere near the above is *Empires*, by Imperial Software. The trouble with *Empires* is that the saved data sometimes gets bugged, or the tapes won't load because of using different tape recorders. Otherwise, it's a start in the right direction.

Your magazine is very readable. It has got me interested in some of the computer role playing adventure games, like *Lords of Midnight*, or Level 9's games. Could you please review the game *ATRAM!* It's a computer assisted boardgame.
Gareth Evans

Missing Lynx

I AM a Lynx owner who is very interested in text adventures. I enjoyed solving Level 9's excellent *Middle Earth* trilogy and *Snowball*, but they seem to have recently dropped the Lynx altogether and are no longer selling games for it. The Lynx has recently been upgraded to 96K, and I am disappointed at the lack of adventures for it. It has plenty of user RAM, far more than micros like the BBC B and Spectrum, and yet they get all the software.

Admittedly, demand is much less — but it is not surprising that there is little demand for a micro, when no-one sells any decent adventures for it.
Phil Armour

Wintersoft's ring

I HAVE recently completed Wintersoft's excellent adventure *Return of the Ring*, which I would highly recommend.

If anyone is having difficulty solving any of the problems, I would be glad to help if they write to me enclosing a stamped self-addressed envelope.

I would like to see your reviewer take a closer look at more Dragon material rather than a brief comment in the news section.
David Cochrane
115 Grey Street
North Shields
Tyne and Wear
NE30 2EG

Eureka

I THANK Tony Bridge for his enlightening article on *Eureka!* in January's *Micro Adventurer*, but was most surprised to read "as I haven't got very far in the adventures, I can't really answer for later tasks . . ."

His conclusions on the program are in direct contrast with your comment on page 12 — "the response to the *Eureka!* competition has been overwhelming — largest entry ever" — and to the many people who have written to our office.

The overall test is surely what your readers think, which is why we say "tell us what you think".
Mark Strachan
Domark Ltd

Bridge again

I FEEL the biggest room for improvement lies with Tony Bridge's Adventure Help. The article is good, so good it deserves far more room than is presently allocated. Us adventurers spend our playing with adventures — not buying them; yet your reviews take up far more space than Adventure Help. One less page of reviews means one more for Tony Bridge. I would question however the expansion of the Adventure Contact section. I myself sent in an entry which was never printed. A lady I met through your pages also told me how, by the time I had answered her entry, she had solved the problem. Although both perfectly understandable situations it illustrates my point that it only has limited potential.
G R Carre

NEWS DESK

If you think you've something newsworthy, call 01-437 4343 and let us know

All American Adventures

ALL AMERICAN ADVENTURES — AAA for short — is a new label being launched by Ocean and Centresoft, to complement their existing joint venture, US Gold.

According to Geoff Brown of Centresoft, "It is a parallel exercise to US Gold, with the object of making the best of US adventures available in the UK at prices in line with home produced software."

The first game to appear under the AAA banner will be *Exodus Ultima 3*, from Sierra On-Line, to be published in February. It will be on disc for the CBM 64 and Atari, at £14.95.

In addition to the first two games in the *Ultima* series and *Ultima 4*, which has yet to be written, AAA has also licensed games by Synapse and Strategic Simulations Inc.

The Synapse games are in a new series called *Electronic Novels*. Each game is a two disc set which comes with a specially written book. Geoff Brown says that the books "are interactive with the discs." The first two Synapse titles are *Mindwheel*, a psychological thriller, and *Essex*, a science fiction adventure.

The two games from SSI are *Questron* and *Gemstone Warrior*.

All four games will be released at Easter. *Mindwheel* and *Essex* will be £19.95, and *Questron* and *Gemstone Warrior* £14.95.

SSI's range of wargames has also been licensed, but to US Gold. Two of them, *Battle for Normandy* and *Combat Leader*, were released in January at £14.95. They will be followed by *Knights of the Desert* and *Tigers in the Snow*.

All will be £14.95 on disc and cassette for the Commodore and Atari, with Spectrum 48K versions promised to follow.

Normandy is self-explanatory; *Combat Leader* combines strategy with arcade action; *Knights of the Desert* covers the North African campaign of 1941; and *Tigers* is based on the Battle of the Bulge.

QL-Day

GAMES WORKSHOP will release *D-Day* for the QL on March 1.

Adapted from an earlier Spectrum program, *D-Day* will be a one or two player wargame using some 200K of memory. Of that 200K, computer intelligence for the one player version takes up 20K.

The game will feature nearly twice the playing area, and up to 14 different types of units. Players will be able to choose from 10 to 100 units per side.

QL *D-Day* will come on two microdrive cassettes, at £24.95.

Games Workshop is also working on the sequel to *Tower of Despair*, the company's first venture into computer adventures. Called *The Key of Hope*, it will be a double adventure, mainly text, but featuring graphics of objects which can be found.

Key of Hope has been largely written by Carol Clarke, with help from her husband Russel and Mike McKeown, two of the team responsible for *Tower of Despair*.

It will be released on March 1 for the Spectrum 48K at £7.95, and for the CBM 64 around the beginning of April at £8.95.

Among the other projects under development at Games Workshop are a computer version of the boardgame *Talisman*, *Chaos*, a game for one to eight players involving conflict between opposing spellcasters, and a computer moderated boardgame version of *Rollerball*.

If anyone is still stuck in *Tower of Despair*, hint sheets can be obtained from Games Workshop's Mail Order Department, 27/29 Sunbeam Road, London NW10 6JP if you include a stamped SAE.

Ket conquered

THE PRIZE for the first 100% solution to Incentive Software's *Ket* trilogy has gone to Tom Frost, of Montrose in Scotland.

Tom contacted Ian Andrews, Incentive's managing director, just before Christmas. After intense study of his solutions to the three games in the series, *The Mountains of Ket*, *The Temple of Vran*, and *The Final Mission*, Ian was able to confirm that Tom had won the £400 video recorder along with the unofficial title of Britain's Best Adventurer.

Tom is 47, and a quality control chemist. He became involved with adventures because he uses computers at work. He also writes games — his *1942 Mission* won a prize in the Cambridge Awards, and has been published by CCS.

He has also written two pieces on the *Ket* trilogy for *Micro Adventurer* — but Ian Andrews was quick to point out that he had no extra help because of that.

Tom was very nearly pipped at the post by Rex Taylor, of Milton Keynes. It was so close that Incentive has put together a consolation prize of software for Rex.

There may be larger prizes around, but amongst adventure afficionados *Ket* was considered the Grail. As Tom says, "It makes a change for a prize to have been won."

l to r — Tom Frost, Richard MacCormack (Ket author), Ian Andrews



Howarth moves

BRIAN HOWARTH, author of the *Mysterious Adventure* series, has joined Adventure International UK as a full time employee. He has been working for AI as a freelance for some time, converting games for the C16, but is now taking charge of the company's programming team.

Spiderman, *The Hulk*, and *Claymorgue Castle* (Adventure 13 in the Scott Adams Classic Adventure Series) have already been released for the C16, and more in the Classic series are to follow soon, all converted by Brian.

Mike Woodroffe, AI UK's managing director, says that Brian will also be converting the *Mysterious Adventure* series for the C16, for release sometime in February by Adventure International.

John Williams of Channel 8, the company which publishes Brian's games at present, denies that AI has the rights to the C16 versions.

"We have contracts with Brian Howarth, the programmer, which stipulate that we have the rights to produce versions for any machines except those made by Tandy," says Williams.

"We are planning to release C16 versions ourselves, but not until the middle of this year."

Shadowfire

SHADOWFIRE is an innovative adventure from Beyond Software which, the company hopes, will repeat the success of *Lords of Midnight*.

Programmed by Denton Designs, the ex Imagine team responsible for Ocean's arcade adventure *Gift from the Gods*, *Shadowfire* is entirely icon driven. As Beyond's Marketing Manager, Clive Bailey, says "we've thrown away the text."

Icons are on screen symbols which are used to represent possible actions or commands. They are being used more and more in business software, where systems have to be easy to use, even for people with no computing experience.

Rather than having to type in commands, users select the action they want by moving a cursor to the icon representing it.

To learn the programming techniques necessary to create the game, the Denton Design team had to go to Apple Computers, the makers of Lisa and Macintosh, for help.

In *Shadowfire*, a team of six intrepid agents must penetrate the defences of the evil General Zoff's spaceship to rescue a kidnapped ambassador. The player controls the actions of these characters, communicating with them through the use of the icons.

Once one of the six characters has been selected from the main menu, the player will see a large picture of that character, and a plan of the small section of the ship immediately around him, her or it.

Further menus can be accessed, so that a wide range of different commands can be given to each agent. All six, however, have their own individual characteristics and semi independence, so there is no guarantee that things will work out quite as planned.

There are some 70 different icons in all, representing people, objects and actions, but these take up only half the available memory. The rest is being used to provide help screens and a musical score.

Clive Bailey says that the icon driven, menu operated structure "gives you speed and a much bigger game — you don't have to bother with a parser or text."

The game will be as revolutionary as *The Lords of Midnight* was, he believes — "this is the way adventure games will go."

Shadowfire will be available in April for the Commodore 64 and Spectrum 48K, at £9.95.



Eureka competition

IN OUR November issue, we ran a competition in conjunction with Domark, the publishers of *Eureka*. The answers to the questions are Archimedes, Eureka, I have found it, the principle of displacement, his bath, and ran through the streets naked.

The ten winners are R Krawiec of Alvaston, Derby; G Luetchford of Witham, Essex; Mark Graham of Congleton, Cheshire; D Colohan of London SE9; Michael Cutler of Marlow, Bucks; Mrs A Ledger of Carshalton, Surrey; David Green of Camberley, Surrey; W Hitchen of Blackpool, Lancs; Mrs Jean Morris of Kirkcaldy, Fife; and Clive Wild of Onchan, Isle of Man.

They each win a Currah Microspeech unit.

Gargoyle

THE SEQUEL to *Tir Na Nog*, Gargoyle Games' graphic adventure set in the after-world of celtic mythology, will be released in May.

With a working title of *Cuchulainn — the Early Years*, it will be set inside a city, and will feature a cast of some 30 independent characters with whom the player can interact, according to Gargoyle's Greg Follis.

"The main complaint we had about *Tir Na Nog* was that it was too big," claims Follis. "So we're setting the sequel in a city to limit the space.

"We're trying for a much darker game; we want the atmosphere of *Swords of Lankmar*."

There will be no killing in the new game. Players will forfeit items instead of being sent back to the beginning.

Gargoyle will also be releasing *Tir Na Nog* for the Commodore 64 at the end of February. This is to coincide with the Computer Trade Association Awards — *TNN* has been nominated as Best Game of 1984, and Roy Carter, the programmer, has been nominated for Leisure Programmer of the year.

Adventure centres

SPIDERMAN, *The Hulk* and other Scott Adams adventures will be easier to find as a result of a new scheme proposed by Adventure International's managing director, Mike Woodroffe.

He is offering dealers the chance to open a Scott Adams Adventure Centre in their shops. Adventure International will supply the full range of their Scott Adams games, and promotional and merchandising material and will bear the cost of the stock.

MUNG

FOLLOWING the release of *Multi User Dungeon* on Compunet comes news of another multi user game. Called *MUNG* — an acronym for *Multi User Network Game* — it will be run by Infomania Ltd of Watford.

Philipp Picton, Infomania's assistant manager and co-creator of *MUNG*, says that the game will run on an Intel mini, and will have over 10,000 locations. Initially up to 50 people with 1200/75 Prestel type modems will be able to access the game simultaneously, he claims.



So long, and thanks for the adventure

***Martin Croft** talks to Douglas Adams, author of The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

DOUGLAS ADAMS is a household name both here and in America for his classic *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

The creations of his fertile — and entirely organic — brain, Deep Thought the Supercomputer, the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation, and Marvin the Paranoid Android, are familiar to millions. Something about his deeply sceptical view of the wonders of the computer age obviously strikes a chord.

But when he wrote the original radio plays, which have since been turned into four books, a record, a play, a TV series, and an adventure game, he had never even touched a computer.

First time

"My first time with a computer was about 18 months ago," he recalls. "Deep Thought and Marvin were created long before then.

"I have a lot of computers now — but the one I love to bits is my Apple Macintosh. I want to get another Mac with hard discs for my secretary and my girlfriend to use."

In addition to the Apple of Adams' eye, soon to have a mate, he has a Dec Rainbow ("I'm trying to get rid of it"), an Apricot XI, a Tandy Model 100, and a Logica VTS. He is also thinking of buying an Apple IIe. Not bad for someone who was a computer illiterate only a year and a half ago!

During his crash course in computing for business and pleasure he came into contact with adventure games — so when Infocom contacted him about the rights to *Hitch-Hiker*, he had definite ideas about what the game should look like.

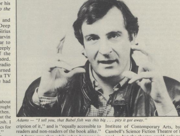
"I feel that there are all kinds of wrong ways bookware could be done, and those are the ones I was determined to avoid.

"I'm pretty pleased with the game, but then I came in with a completely new perspective," he says. "I don't think anyone's done a game like this before.

"The first 20 moves are very easy — anyone can get through it providing they know how to type and don't knock the computer over.

"You are Arthur Dent — but occasionally if you use the Infinite Improbability drive you can be hurtled back in time into the game as another character. You're forced to play through a scene you've played through before, and you have to remember what you did!"

The Infocom game, he claims, is "inspired by the book, not a direct transcription of it," and is "equally accessible to readers and non-readers of the book alike."



Adams — "I tell you, that Babel fish was this big . . . pity it got away."

Adams says that while what happens in the game will be "hauntingly familiar" to those who have read the book, an encyclopedic knowledge of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is not necessary to play the game.

Adams is very pleased with the way Infocom has presented the game — as he enthuses, "it's beautifully packaged — Infocom have done a marvellous job."

The new game, however, is not the first to be published under the *Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* title; "somebody released a *Hitch-Hiker* game about a year ago, but that was without my permission. The Infocom game is not the same game at all."

He was also less than amused when he saw the advertisements for another game which features a number of easily recognisable elements from his books, as well as bits and pieces from other Science Fiction sources.

"I would like everything that goes out as *Hitch-Hiker* material to be under my control. I don't want other people muddying the pool."

This desire to be involved with everything that touches upon his creation extends to all the various adaptations of the books that have been made, or are being made.

For example, there have been three stage productions of *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

"First there was the production at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, by Ken Campbell's Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool — but the theatre could only take 80 people at a time, and we were turning away 1,500 every night. So some producers wanted to take it to a bigger place, the Rainbow in Finsbury Park.

"The problem was that Ken was best at creating the extraordinary out of nothing. In a 3,000 seat hall you don't have nothing. The third production was a very good one by Theatre Clwyd, which toured around the country for a long time."

He also found the television series, shown on BBC a couple of years back, disappointing.

Intimate

"Radio is so much more intimate — both for the listeners and for the creators. With radio, you can imagine for yourself what things look like — but television, no matter how well done, is always someone else's vision."

Hopefully the big screen version of *Hitch-Hiker* will conform more closely to Adams' original creation.

"We're starting production of the movie in the UK in May. It's an Ivan Reitman production — the same people who did *Ghostbusters*.

"Like most of the different versions, it's going to be largely retelling old stuff, but adding extra bits, and locking other parts out." ▶

◀Douglas Adams is associate producer of the film, so he will certainly have some influence on the finished product — but, as he himself is quick to point out, "nobody gets creative control — unless you're Warren Beatty or Robert Redford. There will be teams of creative writers working out new ways of saying nothing."

In addition to his work on the film, and on his new book, *So Long and Thanks For All the Fish*, "the fourth book in the Hitch-Hiker trilogy", as it proudly says on the front cover, he has been working with Jim Henson of the Muppets on a one hour TV special to promote computer literacy.

"The Henson organisation is huge, and very powerful — but full of the nicest possible people doing the strangest things."

Because of the film and the TV special, Adams has had to spend a considerable amount of time in America. While he was there, he discovered modems.

Hooked

"I was in California for seven months, and one day I plugged into the Source [*an American database and electronic mail system, similar to Compunet or Micronet, but far more extensive*] and I'm now hooked on it.

"When I came back I began subscribing to it from the UK. They take people from outside the US, although they don't advertise as it's technically illegal in America to transmit information across national boundaries."

One of the things he finds particularly interesting on the Source is the 'Participate-Debate Forum'.

"Anybody can start a debate; it's like an inter-active newspaper letters column, and there are hundreds of different debates going on simultaneously, some just informational, some really heated."

From computer virgin to magus of the modems and champion of keyboard literacy in only 18 months is an enviable track record for any one.

When it's somebody like Douglas Adams, whose early books show a certain hostility towards the silicon age, it's a sure testimonial to the amount that computers can contribute to today's lifestyle.

Assuming, that is, that they are not paranoid. And that they give you the right answer to important questions — questions like the meaning of life, the universe, and everything . . .

So for all the friends of Arthur Dent, Ford Prefect and Zaphod Beeblebrox, Infocom has provided the opportunity to actively participate in Douglas Adams' universe. He should be proud — his readers now have the chance to interact with his creation.

Who better to have the final word than the Sirius Cybernetics Corporation?

"Share and enjoy!"

Or should that be "stick your head in a pig?" □

Douglas Adams' latest book, *So Long and Thanks For All the Fish*, is published by Pan at £6.95 hardback.

Hitch-Hiker's game

***Andy Pennell** reviews Infocom's game based on Douglas Adams' creation*

THE WELL-RESPECTED American software house Infocom has teamed up with best selling author Douglas Adams to produce a game based on his characters and ideas, and the result can only be described as excellent.

Hitch-Hiker started life as a BBC Radio serial, then a series of books and records, followed by a TV series and a stage play. It is shortly to become a feature film. To produce this many spin-offs, the product has to be good, and *Hitch-Hiker* is certainly that. For those who are not familiar with the 'plot', if it can be called that, (ie for those who have lived in a cave for the past few years) here is a brief resumé.

The actual Guide is a small, pocket-sized computer that no self-respecting Galactic Hitch-Hiker should be without, and with it you can access complete details to anything you require in the known Universe. The story hung around this device involves a human called Arthur Dent, who wakes up one day to find his house is scheduled for immediate demolition to make way for a by-pass. This is a minor problem for him though, as his friend Ford Prefect does not come from Guildford, as he had thought, but from a small planet near Betelgeuse, and he has bad new for Arthur — the Earth is scheduled for demolition to make way for a Galactic by-pass, in about 12 minutes. The story is based on Arthur's adventures after Ford rescues him from Earth's destruction, meeting many weird and wonderful creatures, all of which are mentioned in varying degrees of detail in the Guide itself. Douglas Adams' sense of humour is like no-one else's, and has been successfully transferred to the computer game itself.

The review copy was running on my Apple II, but by the time you read this there should be versions on various other machines, the main one of interest to *Micro Adventurer* readers being the Commodore 64. As Infocom are American, owners of

other machines available in Britain, such as Spectrums, Amstrads and Beebs, can only envy their CBM-owning friends.

The Apple version I had cost £49.60, which is about average for Apple software from the States (and which explains why I have little of it!), though the Commodore version should sell for less. The packaging for such an expensive piece of software is quite different to other (non-Infocom) games — it's in a large box, as you'd expect, and part of the box consists of a 25 page colour manual, containing various bits of information. To start with there is an advert for the Guide itself, in typical Adams' style, along with ordering information. Before you start writing your cheques, I ought to point out that it costs 59.99 Altarian Dollars and is only available from somewhere around the Ursor Minor Beta area!

Next in the manual come the instructions proper (if that is the right word) including useful tips and a sample session. The most important part of this is the list of main verbs to be used for the game, which is invaluable. In the box itself there are some very important tools for all Hitch-Hikers, namely a 'Don't Panic' badge, a piece of fluff, a Microscopic Space Fleet (which some could mistake for a small, empty polythene bag), and a pair of Peril Sensitive Sunglasses (which are, naturally, always black). Also included are the demolition orders for Arthur's house, and similar orders (but in a language like no other) for the destruction of the Earth. Oh, I almost forgot, there is a disc in the box too! I would have thought that Infocom would have included a towel (the most important item ever), but I don't suppose it would have fitted into the box.

The game itself plays similarly on all the machines it runs on with certain inevitable differences. On the Apple version, all output is upper-case only, to suit the hardware, but CBM owners will hopefully get the luxury of lower-case on their version. This is a disc-based adventure, and Apple drives could not be called fast, but Commodore drives are even slower, so there could be additional delays on the 1541 drive.

The game starts with the player as Arthur Dent, waking up one morning. The first objective is to get up successfully, which is rather tricky in itself, because the previous night's drinking session has given you a heavy hangover, which has to be dispersed before the rest of the game can start. Even at this early stage the Adams touch becomes apparent, with numerous witticisms. For example, if you spend too long in the bedroom, the message 'Shouldn't you be taking more interest in the world around you? While you've got it . . .?' will appear.

Having cleared your head, you go downstairs, only to discover the demolition orders lying on the doorstep. When you go outside you are faced with a large yellow bulldozer, and Mr Prosser from the Council, ready to knock your house down.

On my first playing, at this point I reached for my copy of the book, which gave the solution to the problem. Before this, I had tried various unsuccessful attempts to stop the bulldozer, and when



the house gets knocked down a flying brick kills you. However, mere death does not end the game, as your corpse gets picked up by an ambulance, and you get taken to the mortuary. By this stage you have little control over what you can do. Eventually, the game ends when the Vogons come along and destroy the Earth.

Should you get off Earth before the Vogons get trigger happy, you appear in a dark place. If you take too many attempts to solve the problem, a hint is given, and later another one will appear, which is just as well as the HELP command just gives an advert for Infocom Hint books and maps (all only $9.95!).

The dark place turns out to be the Vogon ship, which is unfortunate as Vogons are not nice (well, nice aliens don't tend to destroy planets, do they?), and problems soon arise, not least of which is the dreaded Vogon poetry.

If you survive it, you have the bad luck to be thrown out of the Airlock into space. I won't explain how (though ardent *HH* fans will, with all probability, know), but you and Ford get picked up by a passing spaceship, manned by a certain Zaphod Beeblebrox (who has an additional head and arm), Trillium, a girl from Earth, Marvin the paranoid android, and Eddie, the shipboard computer. You can communicate with all of these, with limited success, though Marvin has a special feature — whenever he enters the room you are in, 'You feel a wave of depression' and he doesn't talk about much else. The ship, called the *Heart of Gold*, is pretty small in the game, but offers more problems, and it's as far as I've got so far.

Early in the game Ford gives you the Guide, and says 'I shouldn't tell you this, but you can't finish the game without it', then at any point you can 'CONSULT GUIDE ABOUT . . .' whatever you like. Most of the time you get useful information, but sometimes an amusing excuse appears for the lack of hard facts.

You can quiz the computer itself about certain things, such as basic questions like 'Who am I', but trickier enquiries like 'Where is Ford' usually produce a not very helpful 'Beats Me', reply.

The former question is not as stupid as it seems as you change characters during the game, although I've yet to experience that myself.

Hints are occasionally given, as are useful titbits — if you get near to solving a problem, it can say 'No, but you're getting closer', and if you are way off, it will say things like 'Complete waste of time'.

During descriptions, references are sometimes made to footnotes, and by typing Footnote x as a command it prints out further information on the subject. I recommend that you don't print the footnotes before the text refers to them, as I did, as it can spoil some of the fun to come.

Certain events can happen 'real time', for example the 'Careless talk costs lives' sequence, when a sentence at the wrong time produces a story, followed by 'You destroyed most of a small Galaxy. Please choose your words with greater care'.

As you would expect, the game is littered with objects, all of which seem important. When you get an Inventory, always included in the list of items is 'No Tea', 'just like the tea professional hitch-hikers don't carry. One object is consistently called 'The Thing your Auntie gave you and you don't know what it is', which thankfully can be abbreviated in commands to the Thing. I'm sure it's going to be important, but until I re-read the books or get to a suitable point in the game I won't know.

At the end of the game you get given your score (it is recommended that you put on your Peril Sensitive Sunglasses before reading it) which is given out of 400, along with the number of moves taken. To date I have scored 40, though I once scored a record low of − 47! This means that I have only just touched the surface of the program, so I will have something interesting to occupy me during the cold Winter (and my Apple overheating will keep me warm too!). The game starts by following the books closely, but diverges soon after, while using the characters and concepts from them.

With the repeat of the radio series over Christmas, the release of the fourth book, logically (?) called *Goodbye, and thanks for all the fish* and the feature film shortly, *HH* madness will again reach fever pitch, and this game successfully captures the humour, lunacy and fun of the original. It is quite simply the most enjoyable adventure I have ever played, and is a must for adventure fans with the required machines. It is sure to convert those remaining few who are not *Hitch-Hiker* fans, and is bound to increase sales of the books and records, which are, after all, cheaper than the Infocom hints books. The Apple price of £49.60 is expensive, and the CBM 64 version in this country is bound to be cheaper, but the game is superlative all the same. I think that those who currently hero worship Scott Adams are shortly to give the same high regard to his namesake Douglas. ☐

Vaster than Empires

*These are the voyages of the starship **Ken Matthews** — visiting Imperial Software's Empires*

MESSAGE BEGINS . . .

Intruders, your warships have violated Tyrrinian space. Unless your fleet is withdrawn immediately, it will be destroyed. War will continue until every humanoid in the Galaxy is annihilated.

Warlord SKYTH for the Imperial High Council of Tyr
Message End.3025.1

And so you realise why four mining expeditions to that sector of space mysteriously disappeared. The crazed messages about giant lizards make sense as you study the hideous reptilian features of the Warlord of Tyr.

Pausing only momentarily, you walk to the Com-link — your message to Admiral Ranshelm, your Starfleet Commander, is brief:

OPEN FIRE.

Raygen, Lord Emperor.

It seems that, known only to a select few, Galactic War of incredible scale is being monitored all over Britain.

I refer to *Empires*, a computer moderated wargame from Imperial Software of Imperial House, 153 Churchill Road, Poole, Dorset. The program is probably best termed a play-by-mail game, although there is no reason why a group of friends living locally to one another or meeting at school, computer club and so on should not have a go — indeed such groups as the South London Warlords already have.

Empires has been around since early 1984 and already two expansion packs are available and a Newsletter has been published by Imperial to give some idea of the game's growing number of supporters.

The *Basic Set* contains three Player Tapes, an Umpire Tape, data cards, Galactic maps and four sets of instructions. Thus, for £19.95, four people can get into the struggle for dominion of the Universe — at £5.00 each, that's not bad!

Expansion Set One consists of three more sets of player equipment to allow a total of six players plus the Umpire.

As far as playing the game is concerned, each player is given his own tape containing the Main Programme, First Move Data, a message program and a loader program — more details later.

The Umpire has his own tape containing two Main, First Move, message and loader programs. Each player has his own rule book, but they are identical except for details of the player's Home System on the back cover.

War is waged on a grid of 12 × 30 light years containing some 100 star systems. All the players and the Umpire have copies of this map.

Now you have a good idea of what you get with the game, let's take a more detailed look at play.

To begin, each player loads his own main program followed by the first move data on the reverse of the cassette. He then has one game 'year' to complete his move using options from the menu-driven, machine code program.

The player has the task of balancing the generation of military strength to defend/expand his Empire, and the mining of other systems to provide the income to keep the Empire solvent.

On each turn, providing the cash holds out, the player may build scout ships, battle cruisers, cargo or mining ships. Occasionally, when enough credits have been amassed, the player is given the opportunity of commissioning a Starship — a vessel of truly awesome power! Obviously, such undertakings are not completed in a day and several game years may pass before a commissioned fleet can take to the spaceways. Once completed, a battle fleet can be assigned to any of your nine commanders or a prospecting fleet to any of your nine mining companies — providing they are in the home system.

Battle fleets may be used to guard your mining operations, garrison the outposts of your Empire or take the initiative against your enemies. Mining fleets must travel to and return from a prospected system before the wealth they have mined reaches your coffers. At least one year is required to extract the mineral wealth and you must be sure to send enough cargo ships to bring the plunder home.

The data cards supplied are invaluable in keeping track of the systems visited and the movements of battle fleets and mining companies. The Umpire's rule book contains clear examples of how the cards should be filled out.

At the end of each turn, the player program generates small pieces of data which are saved on a separate tape which is then passed to the Umpire.

The message program allows a player to generate and receive messages as data, to pass to the Umpire and other players.

The Umpire simply collects the data returned from each of the players and loads it into his program. This masterpiece assimilates all data received and resolves any conflicts caused by opposing fleets arriving in the same system. The program then generates new pieces of data for each player which are saved and returned to the player, along with any messages, for the next move. The Umpire tape cleverly incorporates the player's build-in racial characteristics and the morale of his officers.

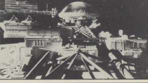
The Umpire is also responsible for passing on any messages between players, together with any of his own.

The loader program allows players and Umpire to set volume and tone levels to eliminate differences between recorders.

There are six races in the Galaxy of *Empires*:

The Federation of Earth — a basically peaceful bunch, keen to explore the secrets of the Universe. To boldly go . . .

The reptilian Warlords of Tyr — the oldest race in the Galaxy, now free of the sulphurous atmosphere of their own world.





The Robozons — the evolved product of a long-dead master race, created to perform menial tasks but now with a will of their own.

The lovable Lortep — War is unknown to them but these Kermit-like creatures have staggering technical ability.

The Murtceps — a (backward ?) boorish, aggressive race, bent on the enslavement of any life form they encounter.

The Clone Masters too are the product of superior minds but their nature and, it seems, the purpose of the Clone's expansion into the Galaxy remains something of a mystery.

Galactic War continues until only one player survives — there are three ways in which a player can lose and be removed from the game:

Population can be reduced to drastic levels — an unlikely prospect.

Your Empire's outgoings could exceed the income — you could go bankrupt — Imagine that!

Your Home System could be destroyed — watch your back.

The first two situations are dealt with by the player's own program. Destruction of the home system will be revealed by the Umpire programme as battles are resolved. Planetary defence systems are very powerful however, and no unassigned vessels are incorporated into the defence network.

For the more diplomatic player, it is possible to form alliances, up to a maximum of five, but of course there can only be one winner . . . unless the Umpire rules differently.

Looking back over what I've written, I can see there is a great deal of information which might make the game seem incredibly complex. This is not the case. Of course, the strategies and moves you can try are virtually limitless, and so there is no clear optimum sequence of moves.

The cassette sized rule book is laid out neatly and logically and only takes about 10 to 15 minutes to read quite thoroughly. Personally, I'd have liked them to have been bigger, perhaps with some of the artwork shown in the Newsletter to break up the text. Those of you who have refereed wargames or roleplaying games needn't worry about Umpiring either — your book is even shorter than the player's. The work is done by the program leaving you to work your own imagination into the game — this is the whole point of *Empires*.

The best way to understand *Empires* is to play, and over the last few days, with a group of friends, that's just what I've done.

Loading the game takes only a few minutes — just enough to make a coffee and sit down to ponder your first move. During this time your player number and a high-res picture of your race is shown.

Once you've loaded the first move data, the screen displays a menu of options. The current stardate is shown and it increases by one 'month' each time you return to the main menu. I always completed my move within the twelve months — maybe I was missing something? There is no reason why you shouldn't play out several different moves to decide which to use, providing you don't mind reloading the game each time — I very soon got a feel for the game and the data cards made it very simple to make a record of my progress before saving out my 'final' move data.

The message program is the way in which players can really get into the spirit of things to express their individuality within the persona of their race. The *Newsletter* showed some very imaginative and amusing examples. Hard copies of messages and some game screens are made whenever a printer is attached to the machine. This feature makes it even easier for the players to keep track of events.

The Umpire has the most 'work' to do in terms of loading and saving up to six lots of player data, but only he sees the full picture and we found watching the war unfold an exciting experience — much better than waiting for the football results.

The Umpire too, because of his almost total control, has the most opportunity to use his imagination to add realism for the players. Many suggestions for added detail are given in the Umpire's rule book and the *Imperial Newsletter* such as rumours passed to all players, leaked information and even subtly changing players' messages as though they were garbled in the ether. Ex-*D&D* players should take to this readily — there is a chance to build a full fantasy world about the central theme of *Empires*.

The review material included a set of data from a six player game at move 25. After playing the opening moves to get the hang of things, it was really exciting to take over a more fully developed system with large fleets and extensive mining operations. The only thing we lacked was a knowledge of how things had developed to this stage, when ships had been ordered, what alliances made and so on. Nevertheless, we were all soon engrossed in making sure our race would become masters of the Universe.

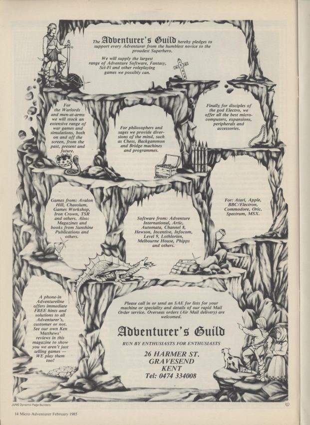
For those with more time on their hands, or just an urge to play God, *Expansion Pack Two* allows you to create and populate your own Galaxy. The first move data is also generated by the Umpire so it is possible to devise a scenario where one race has a distinct advantage and could, perhaps, only be beaten by other players forming and maintaining an Alliance. "The Umpire Strikes Back" also allows for more interference with player's fleets and money supply — a truly devilish twist!

There were a few minor points I'd like to see added; an option to restart a move for example and some notification of shipbuilding progress, alliances and other details. There were also a few that should be removed, like the tendency of the program to crash if you make the wrong input during a move.

All in all though, I found *Empires* an absorbing and compulsive game with a potential that is almost limitless.

If any players are reading this, I (and Imperial) would be pleased to see any ideas and tips you've used to add to your game or any routines you've written to aid or enhance play.

In the meantime, the Murtceps have declined to answer my ultimatum and Admiral Ranshelm is impatiently waiting for his orders. □



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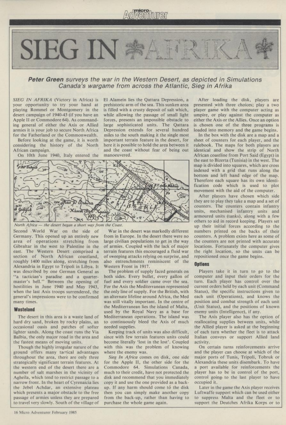
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SIEG IN AFRIKA

***Peter Green** surveys the war in the Western Desert, as depicted in Simulations Canada's wargame from across the Atlantic, Sieg in Afrika*

SIEG IN AFRIKA (Victory in Africa) is your opportunity to try your hand at playing Rommel or Montgomery in the desert campaign of 1940-43 (if you have an Apple II or Commodore 64). As commanding general of either the Axis or Allied armies it is your job to secure North Africa for the Fatherland or the Commonwealth.

Before looking at the game, it is worth considering the history of the North African campaign.

On 10th June 1940, Italy entered the Second World War on the side of Germany. This opened up an entirely new area of operations stretching from Gibraltar in the west to Palestine in the east. The Western Desert comprised a section of North African coastland, roughly 1400 miles along, stretching from Alexandria in Egypt to Tripoli in Libya. It was described by one German General as "a tactician's paradise and a quartermaster's hell." Between the opening of hostilities in June 1940 and May 1943, when the last Axis troops surrendered, the general's impressions were to be confirmed many times.

Wasteland

The desert in this area is a waste land of hard dry sand, broken by rocky plains, an occasional oasis and patches of softer lighter sands. Along the coast runs the Via Balbia, the only major road in the area and the fastest means of moving units.

Though the highly irregular nature of the ground offers many tactical advantages throughout the area, there are only three strategically significant terrain features. At the western end of the desert there are a number of salt marshes in the vicinity of Agheila, which tend to restrict passage to a narrow front. In the heart of Cyrenaicia lies the Jebel Achdar, an extensive plateau which presents a major obstacle to the free passage of armies unless they are prepared to travel very slowly. South of the village of El Alamein lies the Qattara Depression, a prehistoric arm of the sea. This sunken area is filled with a crusty deposit of salt which, while allowing the passage of small light forces, presents an impossible obstacle to large sophisticated units. The Qattara Depression extends for several hundred miles to the south making it the single most important terrain feature in the desert, for here it is possible to hold the area between it and the coast without fear of being out manoeuvered.

North Africa — the desert began a short way from the Coast.

War in the desert was markedly different from in Europe. In the desert there were no large civilian populations to get in the way of armies. Coupled with the lack of major terrain features this encouraged a fluid war of sweeping attacks relying on surprise, and also entrenchments reminiscent of the Western Front in 1917.

The problem of supply faced generals on both sides. Every bullet, every gallon of fuel and every soldier came over the sea. For the Axis the Mediterranean represented the only line of supply. For the British, with an alternate lifeline around Africa, the Med was still vitally important. In the centre of the Mediterranean lies the island of Malta, used by the Royal Navy as a base for Mediterranean operations. The island was to continuously bleed the Axis of much needed supplies.

Keeping track of units was also difficult, since with few terrain features units could become literally 'lost in the lost'. Coupled with this was the problem of knowing where the enemy was.

Sieg In Africa comes on disk, one side for the Apple II, the other side for the Commodore 64. Simulations Canada, much to their credit, have not protected the disk and recommend that you immediately copy it and use the one provided as a back-up. If any harm should come tó the disk then you can simply make another copy from the back-up, rather than having to purchase the whole game again.

After loading the disk, players are presented with three choices; play a two player game with the computer acting as umpire, or play against the computer as either the Axis or the Allies. Once an option is chosen one of the three programs is loaded into memory and the game begins.

In the box with the disk are a map and a sheet of counters for each player, and the rulebook. The maps for both players are identical and show the strip of North African coastline from Port Said (Egypt) in the east to Bizerta (Tunisia) in the west. The map is divided into squares, which are cross indexed with a grid that runs along the bottom and left hand edge of the map. Therefore each square has its own identification code which is used to plot movement with the aid of the computer.

After players have chosen which side they are to play they take a map and a set of counters. The counters contain infantry units, mechanised infantry units and armoured units (tanks), along with a few others to aid in record keeping. Players set up their initial forces according to the numbers printed on the backs of their counters. A problem exists here as some of the counters are not printed with accurate locations. Fortunately the computer gives the right location, so the units can be repositioned once the game begins.

Options

Players take it in turn to go to the computer and input their orders for the turn. Each player has control over the current orders held by each unit (Command Status), the specific instructions given to each unit (Operations), and knows the position and combat strength of each unit (Unit Status), and the positions of known enemy units (Intelligence), if any.

The Axis player also has the option of reallocating supplies between units, while the Allied player is asked at the beginning of each turn whether the fleet is to attack Italian convoys or support Allied land activity.

On certain turns reinforcements arrive and the player can choose at which of the major ports of Tunis, Tripoli, Tobruk or Alexandria these units disembark. To have a port available for reinforcements the player has to be in control of the port, control going to the last player to have occupied it.

Later in the game the Axis player receives Luftwaffe support which can be used either to suppress Malta and the fleet or to support the Deutches Afrika Korps or to

engage in air reconnaissance to discover Allied dispositions.

After inputting their orders in secret the players then both watch the screen while it displays the results of their actions.

The initial set up of units is historically accurate. At the beginning of the game the Allies have three units available, two at Mersa Matruh and one at Alexandria. The Axis player starts off with 14 Italian units situated throughout Axis territory.

Unit's strengths are stored in the computer's memory (not printed on the counters) and are subject to change depending on morale, how well supplied they are and whether they have taken any losses in combat.

Initially the Allied player is forbidden by Churchill to invade Libya until the Italians invade Egypt or Rommel arrives in the desert. On the other hand the Axis player is more or less forced to invade early, as units are rapidly starved out by the allied Fleets' attacks on Italian shipping. Sitting and waiting for reinforcements ensures that most of the original Axis units starve to death before they can be put to any real use.

Attacking also has its problems; compared to the Combat strength of the Allied units, the 14 Italian units are pathetic. Good historical stuff, but the Axis player should be prepared to lose most of his/her units in the first attack, while the Allied player escapes relatively unscathed.

This is later offset by the arrival of Rommel and the 5th Panzers. From turn five to turn eight the Axis player is asked by Hitler whether he wishes to have Rommel arrive early. If not, Rommel and the 5th Panzers arrive automatically on turn nine. Bringing them in early greatly increases the Axis players strength but causes a subsequent loss of victory points at the end of the game. With Rommel and the Panzers, the Axis player has a more formidable force capable of taking on and beating the Allied armour units. Another advantage is that Axis armour units are rebuilt each turn regardless of where they are. Allied units have to be in Alexandria before this can occur.

Reinforcements

Allied reinforcements begin to arrive from turn two, while the Axis reinforcements arrive in turn five at the earliest (Rommel and the 5th Panzers) or turn seven when the first Italian reinforcements arrive. Unfortunately the early Italian replacements are very weak and are soon destroyed in combat.

On the plus side the Allied player has to cope with the problems of units being withdrawn. At one point I was making a big push into Libya when half of the units involved were taken away, putting an end to my invasion plans. This is a nice historical touch, as these units were actually withdrawn without notice. But after playing a few times it is possible to know when they are to be pulled out and plan accordingly.

Intelligence is the game's strongest point. At the beginning of the game all enemy units are known to both players. Once units start to move the amount of intelligence available rapidly drops off. Typical intelligence information consists of, for example, "unit at map reference C17," "unit near map reference B18," and in some cases "7th Armour at B16" along with its current combat strength. Thus it is possible to lose sight of all enemy units and so be operating totally in the dark.

Weaknesses

At first impressions *Sieg In Afrika* seems to cover all the elements of desert warfare right down to supply and the problems of intelligence.

However, a number of weaknesses exist in the game. Firstly the documentation is far too thin. The maps have no scale printed on them and the rules give no indication of how far units are able to travel in one of the month long turns. The designer claims this would not be known, but any commander of the time would have an approximate idea of the time required for units to move from one place to another. Admittedly, through play this becomes more obvious, but as a player you are far more in the dark than the generals of the time would have been.

The phase where the computer moves the units is also painstakingly slow. This consists of four impulses in which messages are printed on the screen, such as "recon unit locates an enemy force at such and such a map reference", and "unit has reached its objective". No indication is given, however, of which unit has reached its destination or even whether the units are Allied or Axis. This is supposed to indicate what information would be available to a commander by intercepting radio messages, but as a commander you would know whether those messages were in German or English!

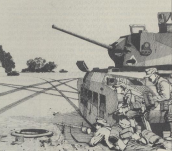
Playing against the computer as the Axis player I found it quite easy to win by attacking Allied units with the majority of my force, while a mechanised unit rushed for Alexandria to prevent the arrival of any more Allied reinforcements. Once Alexandria was secured it was just a matter of mopping up what was left when Rommel arrived, as the Allies make no attempt to retake Alexandria, a mistake that a human opponent is unlikely to make.

Playing a human opponent also has its problems, for both players must be able to have their maps in front of the computer during their turn in order to plot their movements. This means you must either move or conceal your map during your opponents turn, both of which run the risk of counters becoming misplaced.

Fog of war

Although on disc, *Sieg In Afrika* could just as easily been a cassette based system. Once the game is loaded it doesn't access the disc at all during play. The disc drive is simply used as a fast cassette system and the potential to continuously access the disc and increase the memory available is not taken.

Sieg In Afrika's slow response time greatly mars its performance. It is, however, a step in the right direction for computer wargames. The way it recreates the fog of war is admirable, excellently avoiding the board wargamers' problem of being able to see all enemy units at once. □





Gamble in Vegas?

THE WINTER CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW, the biggest exhibition of its kind in the world, was held in Las Vegas, Nevada, at the beginning of January.

Many software houses take the opportunity to preview their new releases for the coming year, and although quieter than last year due to the depressed state of the software market, there were still a number of new adventure and strategy games on display.

Following his role in Melbourne House's *Sherlock*, the master detective makes another appearance in an adventure called, appropriately, *Another Bow*.

Software houses are able to produce competing games based on the same literary character, in this case Sherlock Holmes, when the copyright on the original literary creation has expired. This usually happens 50 years after the author's death.

A joint venture between Imagic, one of the better known US software houses, and Bantam House, the book publishers, *Another Blow* takes place aboard the *SS Destiny* soon after the close of the First World War. The player, as Holmes, will apparently meet a number of historical personages including Henry Ford, Alexander Graham Bell, Lady Astor, and Louis Armstrong.

Another Bow is the second adventure game to be published by Bantam and Imagic under their *Living Literature* label. The first in the series is an adaptation of a fantasy trilogy by R A MacAvoy. Entitled *I, Damiano, the Wizard of Partestrada*, the game is set in the 14th century. The player is Damiano, the wizard's son, who must save his home town — and humanity — from evil.

Both games will be available for the IBM PC, Apple II series, and Commodore 64, at $39.95.

Also from Imagic is *Macbeth, the Computer Adventure*, licensed from Oxford Digital Enterprises in the UK. This joins an adaptation of H G Wells' *The Time Machine* in the *Time Travellers* software series. Both games are for the Commodore 64 at $34.95.

Sierra On-Line has a new game combining flight simulation, strategy and arcade action. Called *Dam Busters*, the player can be pilot, navigator, engineer, gunner or bombardier on a Lancaster bomber. No information has been released as to what machines it will be for, or price.

Addison Wesley has perceived an apparent gap in the market, which it has moved to fill with *Rhiannon Software*, adventure games aimed at introducing girls to computers.

The four titles in the series were created by a psychologist and a software designer — both mothers, the catalogue hastens to add.

The titles are *Lauren of the 25th Century, Chelsea of the South Sea Islands* (about a 19th century British girl stranded with her pet Kiwi on a desert island while on her way to public school), *Cave Girl Clair*, and *Jenny of the Prairie*.

All will be for the Apple II series, IBM PC and PC jr, Commodore 64 and Atari 800 and XL at $39.95.

Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego? is a mystery/adventure game from Brøderbund.

The priceless Royal Quartz Collection has been stolen from Kathmandu, and the player must track the thief around the world. Every game is different — the theft, the trail, and the suspect change.

The game is the second release in Brøderbund's *Explorations* series, and is designed to be "educationally entertaining". It will run on the Apple II series, at $39.95.

Also from Brøderbund is a strategy game for the IBM PC called *The Ancient Art of War*. The program contains 11 campaigns from history. Units available are barbarians, archers, and knights, and the package contains a game generator which allows players to design their own campaigns in depth, including the condition of troops and the variations in terrain.

The game is apparently based on the theories of an ancient Chinese military philosopher, Sun Tzu, as embodied in the classic text *The Art of War*. The game will have a Strategy Guide based on his teachings (but hopefully in English).

Activision is another company moving into the interactive fiction field with two games in the *Living Computer Novels* range, *Mindshadow* and *The Tracer Sanction*. Both feature text and graphics, some screens being animated.

In *Mindshadow*, the player wakes up on a deserted beach with amnesia, and must discover his or her identity. *The Tracer Sanction* puts the player, as top agent for the Stellar Intelligence Agency, on the track of 'The Wing', the galaxy's most dangerous criminal.

Infocom released *Suspect*, in which the player is framed for murder while at a Halloween party, and must prove who really did it — or be arrested.

Suspect will be $39.95 on the Atari and Commodore 64, and $44.95 on other micros, including the Apple II, IBM PC, and Commodore Plus 4.

Finally, Parker Brothers, the American board game giant, has released a real video game based on that old British favourite, *Cluedo*.

The VCR Mystery Game — Clue does not run on a computer at all, but on a video cassette recorder (hence VCR).

Up to 18 different crimes can be committed in Mr Boddy's mansion, and the players visit the scene of the crime via the video tape, searching for clues in the various rooms.

Once the players have discovered all the clues they can, they combine the visual clues with information on special game cards in an attempt to solve the mystery.

The game will retail for under $40.

With the exception of *Macbeth*, none of these games have been released in the UK yet.

But, judging from the amount of American software published under licence in the UK over the last month or so, some of them at least will soon be making an appearance. □

Savage adventures

***Ken Matthews** concludes his series of reviews of Scott Adams' Classic Adventures by looking at Savage Island Two, Golden Voyage and The Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle*

THE END IS NIGH! This article rounds off our in-depth look at the Scott Adams classics with hints for, probably, the three most difficult adventures.

Before I begin though, I will correct last month's review of *Savage Island I*, where I suggested "there is no safe place to sleep". Not so! A young adventurer, Damien Meadows of Nutley, Sussex, playing on the Texas, informed ADVENTURELINE that you can sleep on the secluded ledge near the lake. I stand corrected! This makes things a lot simpler — well less hurried anyway.

And so to the reviews.

Savage Island Part Two

You begin in deep trouble! The correct password from Part I is needed which will give you an item to cover your nudity and may suggest a sharp intake of breath. Breath is the last thing you need in a vacuum of course so make sure you get rid of it if you want to survive the next few moves. Time is short, so don't stop to look at things just yet, get to somewhere you can breathe.

Now you'll be able to examine things at your leisure. A little exploration and examination will be a great help towards getting some idea of what to do next and a bloom so beautiful you'll get a crush on it will solve a very old problem. If you remember that lung size is proportional to body size, psychotransfiguration may not seem so much of a drag — if you keep your head covered. You can move on with open eyes.

Once you've seen me, if you see what I mean, you should reach that blinking field, at last, to be confronted with yet another problem. Don't worry, put it out of sight and mind for a moment and take a bit of exercise.



Life is a treadmill? sounds like a clue to me! Of course you'll have to unravel another mystery to tie this one up. If you can push through this location and still hold on, you'll have made a very significant 'move'.

Things should really be dropping into place now and so should you, providing you have tied up all those loose ends.

Clutching an alien device and a few threads of information to suggest a purpose to the whole game you should be able to rid yourself of a paradox — one that's blocking your progress.

The last move is probably the most difficult in that it seems to need inspiration to suggest it. After struggling for hours to use some of the superfluous objects in the game, I finally gave up until meeting Scott at the PCW show — he told me I was only two moves from the end!

To push you in the right direction all I'll say is that your two friends in Part I are your friends in Part II as well, so don't be too annoyed at one of them — he's just doing his job and helping you do yours!

The final touch will yield a burst of gibberish — but, with the aid of the card in the software pack, everything will become clear and the awesome scope of the task you've just completed will be revealed. Of course, if you've got a pirate copy, everything will be as clear as mud — but the Americans have a term for that too — Tough *?!@

Golden Voyage

The second of this month's games boasts a rather outré theme — the King has lost his virility and both he and the Queen will be eternally grateful if you can seek out the elixir that will restore his vigour.

Flush with Royal gold it is a simple matter to gather the items needed for your quest, weigh anchor and set sail for foreign parts.

All you need is on the ship and, providing you keep a sharp look out, you'll soon find a safe landing place.

Careful not to leave yourself stranded, you will be able to equip yourself completely for the rest of the game and seek out the mysterious cave shown on the tablet from the bazaar. It doesn't seem you can do too much there yet, but careful and repeated excavation will pay dividends.

A rocky strand could give you a hard time but a gentle shove will put most of your troubles behind you — there really is no need for violence — but don't forget to rummage in the remains.

Stepping up to the altar you might cleanse your soul to find what is missing and complete the inventory of essential small items. It might seem odd, but dropping what you've recovered could solve a puzzle and indicate that a little back-tracking is necessary.

The right place to say a word is clearly shown so don't go too high. Don't imagine things are over yet — but you can rid yourself of a burden before sailing once again to lose the second.

The world is at your feet — or nearly — if you look for it! At last you can return to the gods with a good idea of what to do next — if the way is no longer 'blocked'.

The cyclops is probably your worst problem — just throw everything you've got at him but be prepared for a visual shock.

The rest is quite straightforward if you don't get trodden on — be assured, your reward will make it all worthwhile.

The Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle

The latest of Scott Adams' series is a little unusual too. To me, it bears more similarity to Infocom's *Enchanter* and *Sorcerer* than to the previous 12 adventures, in that you must find and use spells to complete your quest.

The aim is simply to recover 13 lost stars from Claymorgue Castle but, as ever with Scott, this is easier said than done. Most spells work in more than one place so you must not only obtain them but also find the correct place to use them. The easiest way is to experiment — but remember to save often.

"Open Sesame" is not the way in, so don't go by the book — be a little more imaginative. Don't hold your breath while

worrying about a monster — just get down out of his way.

If you've found the kitchen, I won't need to say much except that 'cabinet' is probably the noun you've been racking your brain for.

A way out is simple to find but the more baffling items are certainly best left until later. Your energy might be better spent on the confines of the plain room!

You should by now have unravelled a few problems, used your seed spell etc. You could see things a lot more clearly if you remember Snow White — it might help get you out of a hole — or into one!

'Raptures(?) of the Deep' is a danger to all divers but a little experimentation will get you out of trouble quite happily.

If you are still content, you could move up in the world and let Mr. Newton help you crack the case.

A little drink will clear the dust from your throat and help you brave one potentially fiery demise. Careful not to blow it (?) you should be no less than three stars the richer.

Happier still, a fakir's trick would do you a favour to make you dizzy with delight.

A close look at the battlements should give you something to aim at and set you up to finish the adventure.

To round things off you'll need to go outside the castle. A bit of pyromania could see you glowing with pride and really getting into things (?).

The Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle

Adventure International (U.K.)

Having stored some stars it's time to end it all with yet another dip but this time a nice dry towel should help once you've reached the centrepiece of things.

Don't Panic! You should only have one (and a half?) spells left so the last bit will be plain sailing.

Regular readers of this series will notice that the clues this month are a little vaguer and more cryptic than usual. There are two reasons for this.

Firstly these three are probably the most difficult of the adventures Scott himself has penned to date. It is very difficult to strike a balance between giving too much away and leaving you none the wiser for reading the hints.

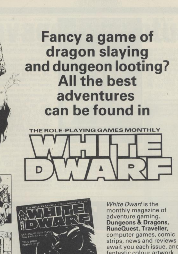
Secondly, I would suggest that none of these games be tackled as an introduction to Scott Adams' work — arm yourself with an early game and some back issues of *Micro Adventurer*. This will give you a good background in these adventures (and my writing style) and let you tackle any of the above with more confidence.

Well, sadly, this series of hint-reviews closes here but, with Adventure 14 — *Return to Pirate Island* — and *Questprobe Three* due for release this month I'm sure it'll be a long time before we hear the last of Scott Adams' games.

Finally, thanks to you, the readers, who've called ADVENTURELINE or written in about the series. Knowing the articles have helped so many of you has made it all very rewarding.

Happily, I've not been put out to grass just yet and next month I'll embark on another mammoth task — complete hint-reviews of the brilliant Infocom series!

In the meantime, for your Scott Adams, Infocom and many other problems try ADVENTURELINE on (0474) 334008. □



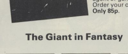
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The Giant in Fantasy
































Introducing the wizards

***Richard Bartle** talks about some of the personalities of the Land of Mud*

I THOUGHT I'd spend time this month introducing to you a few of the personalities, past and present, who have contributed to the history and lore of the Essex University *MUD*. The whole point about multi-player adventures (as opposed to multi-player anything-elses) is that you're playing in the same game as other people, possibly complete strangers in real life, but who you encounter during play and with whom you are likely to engage in conversation. If you spend a fair amount of time in the game chatting to other players, then, as with other similar forms of social interaction (school, work, holiday), you will strike up friendships and get to know folk.

You'll also get to hear of certain other players quite a lot, by virtue of their interesting behaviour. If you see someone acting really strangely, then you'll naturally want to talk to other people about them; if something terrible happens to another player, you'll want to pass on the bad (or good!) news; if a wiz is a soft touch, your friends should know, and similarily if they FODded you for merely daring to utter a meek request for a lit brand, you may wish to warn your acquaintances!

In *MUD*, with its strange ability to magnify the personalities of those who play, there are plenty of people to talk about. Stories about individuals are passed on, rumours circulate, myths form, and eventually certain players become part and parcel of the game itself, blending in with the unique *MUD* atmosphere almost as if they had been programmed in!

This short set of biographies, then, introduces you to some of *MUD's* classic players, who have made their mark in *MUD's* folklore for one reason or another, and whose names live on, even, as is the case with some of them, if they haven't actually been able to play for years. You will notice that they are all wizs: the reason is that you have to play for quite a while for people to get to know your personality, and even longer for them to relate stories about your endeavours to each other (rather in the manner of medieval bards, who wrote ballads about deeds of daring do, to be sung about the campfires on cold, dark nights, perpetuating the names of heroes long since departed). So to become some kind of legendary figure, you have to play for many hours; if you do play for that long then either you'll eventually make it up to wiz, or you're incredibly thick!

Oh, the reason some of these people have two names is because you're allowed two as a wiz. One is normally your real name, the other the one which you used to work up to wiz. For some, the personalities are distinct (SUE is much nastier when she plays as ENDORA!), but for most they're just synonyms. *MUD* players usually put names used in the game in capital letters, by the way, because if you see a splodge of messages whoosh by you can easily see who's mentioned in them! Also, it's an easy way to distinguish between *MUD* names and real-life ones. Anyway, on with the show . . . Here's four *MUD* players for you.

There cannot be the slightest doubt in anyone's mind about who is *MUD's* greatest player — SUE the witch, otherwise known as ENDORA. Sue was our first genuine (ie real, live) female witch, and was until recently the only one (PAULA turned out to be two people, only one of whom was actually female! The new witch is KRONOS). This has not been any kind of handicap for SUE, who plays *MUD* all hours god sends, and I mean ALL of them! As soon as *MUD* becomes playable at around 1am, she sits down at her micro and goes into The Land. She remains there for as long as she can before the need to sleep overcomes her (she only needs three hours a night, though!), but you can usually see her even in the not-so-small hours, like 6am or 7am, before they take away the computer for housekeeping.

SUE does this EVERY night, too! It's a matter of concern if neither SUE or ENDORA appear — people begin to wonder what's happened. She may be playing incognito as a mortal, of course, but sometimes it's more serious (she missed a couple of days this month when a horse fell on her . . .!). Such is SUE's dedication and enthusiasm for the game that she made it to wiz in an astounding four weeks, from complete novice. She was killed on several occasions, too, and had to restart from nothing. She has an intimate knowledge of the way *MUD* functions, and must have tried out virtually every command (swinging the cat in a small room, setting fire to the keg of gunpowder, lighting a brand from the dragon, etc). Few other people will have ever seen the message you get when you attempt to, say, walk the wolf, because they've never tried it.

The wizs don't always see eye to eye with SUE, because she has so much experience at play that if another wiz slips up, she ticks them off about it, and can appear quite bossy! The mortals, however, love her. She knows just the right kind of hints to give which don't exactly spell out the solution to a problem but rather point the way to a solution ("well what do you THINK you do to idols?!"). She also protects them from the ravages of supernatural intervention ("I've just been attacked by the shark — in the forest!"). It is mainly SUE's uncanny knack of making the game FUN to play which has earned her the reputation of epitomising the Essex *MUD*.

Oh, I didn't tell you her real name, did I? It's Sue Thomas, and she's from Llanelli. We think. The suspicion is that anyone who can play *MUD* every night for five or six hours, for eight months on the trot without a break, is probably actually from somewhere in outer space!

JEZ the wizard, or ZAPHOD as he is occasionally known, was our first external *MUD* wiz. Being one of those people who has contacts absolutely everywhere, he heard of *MUD* fairly soon after we opened it to the public and took to it like a duck to water. After several months of glorious bloodletting, and suitably impressive telephone bills, this precocious 17-year-old (as he was then) made it up to wiz. Now, almost two years later, he is our most senior active wizard after me, and along with SUE is trusted enough to be allowed to use an arch-wizard persona called DEBUGGER. This is a very powerful character, used only for debugging purposes (you don't say?), to fix problems like people forgetting passwords, or some drunk wiz causing chaos (yes, it DOES happen!).

JEZ being a man with a huge circle of friends in the modem-using community (you could call them "hackers" if you didn't know the proper meaning of the word), he must have told just about all of them about *MUD*. It was mainly due to his influence, and that of one of his close friends, THOR (also a wiz), that *MUD* ▶

◀ caught on outside Essex. People took his advice, tried the game, liked it, and told their friends. Whenever they looked in, JEZ was in there to greet them with a cheery "hiya", and eventually people got to know him more as JEZ than they did as his real name, Jeremy San. Nowadays, if he doesn't sign his letters "JEZ", most people do a double-take before they remember who he is! Talk about games taking over folks' lives . . .

JEZ must hold the rank of *MUD's* great gossip. If there's any hint of something juicy in the air, you can guarantee that JEZ is in the know about it. Two wizs have a secret assignation in Trafalgar Square? JEZ knows. Someone had to sell their micro to pay their 'phone bills? JEZ heard it first. If you miss a couple of weeks' play, then come back and want to know what's happened, JEZ will be able to fill you in on all the rumours, suitably embellished with his own observations to make them more scandalous.

JEZ spends much of his time in *MUD* talking, listening, and dropping names. Because of this, a lot of the singular *MUD*speke terms have originated from his keyboard. One thing you can be sure of, though, is that whatever he puts between that initial "hiya" and the final "byeeee" it's going to be very interesting!

JEZ, in fact, follows all the goings-on in *MUD* with the devotion of a soap-opera fan. Probably more so, as he's actually in a position to alter the plot! So he knows the last time EGOR played and why he's not around at the moment. He knows what it was that made SUE and KRONOS fall out (and was the one who patched them up again). If there's anything approaching a scandal, JEZ is there, ears flapping, hoping to pick up some titbit of information which he can then loudly publicise . . .!

It follows, then, that JEZ is immensely popular. There's nothing people like more than a good gossiping session, and JEZ is the one to see about that! Even the people who are the butt of his stories tend not to mind, because he does it all very nicely, and besides, it's not long before he's dragging someone else's name through the dirt. Or through *MUD*, I should say . . .

FELICITY and CYNTHIA were the names chosen by Mark Longley, an internal to the University and an addict of science fiction (he reads about one a DAY!). He picked the names FELICITY and CYNTHIA because they were the most terrible names he could think of at the time (CHRISTABEL was too long, and someone was already using CHARLENE). The idea was that people would find the names such dreadful cliches that they would avoid him at all costs. So successful was his ploy that most people couldn't bear to talk to him even at a distance, and they dropped the obnoxious, lengthy versions in favour of the more favourable FLISS and CINTH, depending on which he was using at the time. Indeed, the reason *MUD* has a flower in it was because you could then pick it up, give it to him, and say "Hiya cinth!"

After winning *MUD's* very first spectacular, and getting 25,000 points for so doing, FLISS soon made it to witch, and became one of the kindest, most responsible wizs of all time. It is common knowledge that SUE's great success as a witch is based on her trying to follow FLISS's lead. Asking yourself "What would FLISS have done in this situation?" can be a good way to see sense (although FLISS himself would probably find that highly amusing!).

Mark left the university a couple of years ago now, but FLISS and CINTH still get mentioned from time to time, and there's always the entry in the graveyard. What's it say? "A spectacular life lead me here", of course!

EVIL the wizard was the first person to work his way up to that immortal status, rather than be made one straight away for debugging purposes. He also set a trend since (despite being called Phil Scott in real life!) he is Welsh. A surprising number of *MUD* devotees are of Welsh extraction, although only four have made it to wiz so far at Essex; it must be their barbarian blood (the nationality breakdown is 40 English, five Scottish, four Welsh, one Irish, one American, one Czech and one Malaysian! I've put KRONOS down as English although she claims to be a Scot — ha!).

EVIL made it to wiz in real style. His thorough knowledge of the finer details of the *MUD* world is unsurpassed, except by myself and probably SUE, and he must still be about the only player who figured out by himself what you're supposed to do with the ox (stroke it, take it to the sacrificial blade, stroke it, kill it with the blade, stroke it again, then drop it in the swamp for the points!).

If you wanted to get to any room from any other, no matter how far away, he could give you the shortest route instantly. This was despite the fact that he laboured under a tremendous disability: east-west dyslexia.

It is for this that EVIL is best known. His entire in-the-head map of *MUD*, and all those he wrote down on paper, were flipped east for west. His misapprehension extended to commands, so if he wanted to go west from the start, which is to the left, he'd think it was to the right, and that the command for going to the right was west. So he'd get it correct, but in the wrong way! So absolutely everything was inverted, in a kind of "EVIL through the looking-glass". Indeed, when I finally found out about his error I put a looking-glass in *MUD* to celebrate!

He didn't realise his mistake for years after he'd made it to wiz, and if people used left/right descriptions of rooms instead of west/east, he just thought they were barmy. Only when I drew a map of *MUD* on a blackboard did he finally discover his gaffe, and to this day thinks a subtle change in the physics of the universe caused everyone in the world to swap east for west in their heads except for him, who remained unaffected due to his enormous and obvious intelligence . . .

These then were a few brief sketches of players in the Essex *MUD*. *MUDs* will always have their resident personalities no matter where they are or who runs them, because people ARE the game. That's what lifts *MUD* above the rest of the world's computer games, the real-live people who play.

Anyone who has played in the Essex *MUD* will tell you that although they are identical programs, they "play" quite differently. People brought up in the short lived *MUD* in Dundee are horrified by Essex's large number of killings — they're much friendlier in Scotland! Essex people are astonished by the easy-going wizs in Oslo, who have even been known to temporarily promote mortals so they can see what it's like being a wiz (gasp!).

The people make the game.

That's not the full story, though, because just as people can make an impact on *MUD*, so *MUD* feeds back into their lives. Not only does JEZ have a new name, but *MUD* is what brought EVIL back to do his exams after he decided to take five weeks unscheduled leave from the University. FELICITY'S one-a-day SF book habit was only abated for those days he played *MUD* — saved him hundreds of pounds! SUE, however, may be suffering from an overdose of *MUD*, so it's not always a guaranteed Good Thing. □

For those readers with a Commodore 64 and modem, *MUD* is now running on Compunet.

Readers without access to Compunet can get details of how to access *MUD* from Richard Bartle, Department of Computer Science, Essex University, Colchester, Essex CO4 3SQ. Remember to enclose an SAE.





SOFTWARE INVENTORY

What's on the way in the adventure world — if you have a new adventure, war game or real-life simulation which you are about to release send a copy and accompanying details to Software Inventory, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2H 7PP

Swing the cat

Adventure *Catacombs* **Micro** *Commodore 64* **Price** *£9.95*
Format *Cassette* **Supplier** *Anirog Software*

ANIROG have quite a good reputation as software producers for the C64 and my guess is that *Catacombs* will do them no harm either. It is a text and graphics adventure which includes some moving graphics (notably the cat, Silvester, whose name, I was frustrated to find, could not be spelt Silvestor) but is not real time action. In fact it is a conventional VERB-NOUN game limited to forty or so verbs. I actually found this too limiting and, on first play-testing, gave up in dismay at the number of commands the program did not understand. So its interest lies not in the complexity of possible commands but the visual display and the individual problems.

It also allows you a choice of two roles to play — 'the bold and powerful fighter, Duke' or 'the crafty and cunning witch Oswich' (who seems to be named after a call to the BBC operating system). I must confess that I did not persevere long enough with this game to discover any difference between the two personae. I did find the graphics intriguing and the puzzles hard, but I think part of the difficulty of the game is finding out the commands it recognises which I have always thought is not a great deal of fun. (You are given nine possible commands in the brief instructions). As the game involves combat this brightens up the difficulty somewhat (I quite like the occasional mauling monster in a game, providing he/she does not win, of course).

Despite my personal feeling that this game is rather tedious it is well thought out and any adventurer with a great deal of patience should enjoy it. **NW**

Off the barrow

Adventure *Barrowquest* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£5.95*
Format *Cassette* **Supplier** *Cases Computer Simulations, 14 Langton Way, London SE3 7TL*

ANYONE lucky enough to have a copy of the *Ultima* series of graphic adventures (they're only available unfortunately for the Apple and Atari machines) will recognise this program from CCS. Written by Mr John Sherry (who, quite coincidentally, won the CCS-sponsored Cambridge Award with *The Prince*) it's a frantic romp around a landscape full of nasty monsters, whose only reason for existing seems to be to kill you off with all dispatch.

During Loading, you're given a chance to Load in a previously saved game, or to carry on loading in the data for a new game. Unfortunately, there is no provision, once into the game, for quitting and then going onto another saved game. After two title screens comes a screen of text, which disappears as soon as it is flashed up.

The playing screen is divided into several sections — the most important is the playing area, divided into a five-by-five matrix of squares, each one of which is four character-squares. Each of the twenty-five squares is one of several types of terrain, such as Dark Woods, Swampland, Forest and so on. In the middle of all this is your character, a little person who looks much a Norman soldier. He stays in the middle of the play-screen; as you move him around (with keys or joystick), the surrounding landscape moves rather than the man. Alongside the play-screen is a panel showing your status and what is currently being carried. Beneath all this is a message screen giving you information on what monster you have met, or what treasure you have found.

To start with, your character is in a town centre. Exploration of the rest of the town reveals a Hotel where you can rest and a Store where you can buy food (you cannot carry more than 200 units of food or 200 Gold Pieces). As you move around, or indeed, if you just sit doing nothing, your Stamina will decrease — one point for each step or each few seconds spent daydreaming.

You're pretty safe in the town, but sooner or later, you'll have to move out into the countryside, and then you're fair game to all those monsters. They appear to one side of the playing area, looking suitably menacing and lope towards you, gnashing their fangs or clacking their mandibles (and sometimes both at once!). If you react quick enough (though it must be said here that nowhere in the game is there any real 'arcade action'), you can escape by pressing 'r', for 'Run Away'. This transports you away from danger. In a game which depends so much on careful mapping, this is a great pity — in the early stages, it is prudent to run away from most monsters. As the chances of your winning the fight depend on the relative strengths of the monster and your character, it's obviously a good idea to tackle only the very weak monsters to begin with.

Scattered about the landscape are 20 Barrows — the burial mounds of a long-forgotten race. Barrows are always in the same place, and consist of a network of tunnels. Making sure that you have enough food to make exploration of the tunnels a viable proposition, your character can enter by simply moving onto the square of skulls which denotes the entrance. Once into the tunnels, you'll find several interesting features. In certain places, you'll find treasure, while other caches hold supplies of food and Gold Coins. Also, there are the piles of X-Pills. These quaintly named items will allow you to escape a Barrow when you've had enough.

There are also Castles, which hold their own goodies, like Elfstones and so on, but are rather harder to escape from (OK, so I perished twice in Sartrak's Castle, trying to find a way out!)

Although *Barrowquest* is written in Basic, the program moves along as quickly as necessary. The premise of the game is to progress through the levels of experience, building up strength and treasures along the way. With the Save Game feature, this makes for a powerful and addictive fantasy game which will please the old *D&D*ers among us. **TB**

Staff of Law

Adventure *The Staff of Law* **Micro** *Electron* **Price** *£5.99*

Format *Cassette* **Supplier** *Potter Programs, 7 Warren Close, Sandhurst, Camberley, Surrey GU17 8JR*

THIS is a crudely constructed BASIC program and rather amateurish in several ways. For example it makes little use of the structured features of BBC BASIC, wastes unnecessary amounts of RAM by holding the same messages many times within the code, and expects exact input on some occasions ("GO DOWN STEPS" but not "DOWN", "GO DOWN", "GO DOWN STAIRS", "DOWN STEPS" or any other alternative you might think reasonable).

It has an elementary repertoire built out of only thirty six verbs, has several elementary spelling mistakes which are inexcusable in a professional game (such as a 'load noise', and 'a mountain') and appears to have only about fifty locations to be explored (I'm not perfectly sure of this as I did not complete the adventure but the code seemed to indicate this).

I did not find any bugs in the program but when you find such a programming strategy and such carelessness in format you always fear the worst.

Screen presentation is text only and looks like two windows, one for description and one for input and response, but is actually the whole screen divided by a row of asterisks.

When output is given the whole of this screen is changed, not just one window — a crude and clumsy device. Why not use TAB?

The settings and elements are mainly nicked from Tolkien and the Thomas Covenant books — the villain is the Despiser, the treasure is the Staff of Law, the main goody is Moram (sic) — showing very little imagination.

However despite all this some of the problems show a degree of originality. All that I solved (or cribbed from the listing) were logical enough though some have the fault of expecting you to know what the author wants without giving you much of a hint. If this program is repriced at £1.99 it has enough to while away an afternoon or two, but I'm afraid most *Micro Adventurer* readers could do just as well and will be disappointed if they shell out more for this program. **NW**

Voyage to Islandia

Adventure *Islandia* **Micro** *BBC 32K* **Price** *£9.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Red Shift, 12c Manor Road, Stoke Newington, London N16 5SA*

ISLANDIA is a game of military and economic conflict for two to four players. Each player represents a trading company which attempts to gain control of various islands which have the potential to generate wealth. On start up, the game randomly generates a coloured map of islands clustered around a large central island. The players must now each take turns giving their commands for the disposition and movement of ships and troops. Each game turn consists of an economic phase, plus two movement phases. During the economic phase you may purchase ships, troops and fortifications for your islands. During the combined movement and combat phase, small graphic ships sail between the islands under your keyboard control. Each player's turn takes approx ten minutes to input. At this point the first problem with this game emerges. Four players, times ten minutes can equal instant boredom for all but the player currently entering his move.

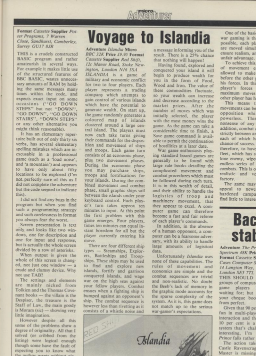
There are four different ship types — Steamships, Explorers, Battleships and Troopships. These ships may be used to find and explore new islands, fortify and garrison conquered islands, and wage war on the high seas against your fellow players. Combat ensues when a fighting ship is bumped against an opponent's ship. The combat sequence is however less than rivetting as it consists of a whistle noise and a message informing you of the result. There is a 25% chance that nothing will happen!

Having found, explored and conquered your island it will begin to produce wealth for you in the form of Food, Wood and Iron. The value of these commodities fluctuate, so your wealth can increase and decrease according to the market prices. After the number of moves which was initially selected, the player with the most money wins the game. As the game can take a considerable time to finish, a Save game command is available to permit the continuation of hostilities at a later date.

War game enthusiasts playing standard board games are generally to be found with large rule books detailing the complicated movement and combat procedures which must be followed during each turn. It is in this wealth of detail, and their ability to handle the logistics of troop and machinery movement, that they appear to excel. A computer game can therefore become a fast and fair referee of each player's commands.

In addition, in the absence of a human opponent, a computer can be a fearsome adversary, with its ability to handle large amounts of logistical data.

Unfortunately *Islandia* uses none of these capabilities. The rules of movement and economics are simple and the combat sequences are trivial and non-realistic. No doubt the Beeb's lack of memory in the graphic mode accounts for the sparse complexity of the system. As it is, this game does not match up to the serious war-gamer's expectations.



One of the basic concepts of war gaming is that, as far as possible, each player's forces are moved simultaneously to ensure realism, and to prevent unfair advantage.

To achieve this, the amount of movement each unit is allowed to make is minimal, before the other player moves his forces. In this game each player's forces make their maximum moves before the other player has his turn!

This means that massive movements can be made by the opposition while you sit powerless. This makes a nonsense of any strategy. In addition, combat at any time is strictly between any two ships, each of which has an equal chance of success. It is possible therefore, to have your entire fleet, which has surrounded a lone enemy, wiped out by an endless series of one to one combats. This is obviously not realistic and very unsatisfactory.

The game may have some appeal to newcomers, but hardened campaigners will find little to interest them. **AM**

Back stabs

Adventure *The Prince* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£7.95* **Format** Cassette **Supplier** *Cases Computer Simulations, 14 Langton Way, Blackheath, London SE3 7TL*

THIS SHOULD be what all groups of computer adventure game players have been waiting for; but hang on to your cheque books, it's far from perfect.

Given that 90 per cent of the fun in multi-player games is interaction and the remaining 10 per cent is a neat game system that's challenging and interesting, I'm afraid *The Prince* falls rather short.

The action takes place in Castle Ravenscrag; the Lore Master is missing, presumed dead. Succession to the exalted post, second only to that of the Prince, is decided by tradition with the "presentation of the tokens". Each of the players must vie to create a power base at court and thus guarantee their ascension to the post. The players may chose to be a Landowner, cleric, merchant

or court official. The winner is the player to secure the most tokens and thus the post.

The nature of the game is almost identical to a solo adventure game, with some 17 non-player characters to interact with, manipulate and worry about on top of the three other player characters. Options are there for blackmail, buying, selling, haggling, in addition to examine, look, take and so on, that we are all used to. The individual player characters are distinctly different, each having abilities and weaknesses.

Having decided which of the characters each of the four will play (I should point out only four, no less) and a pass code given to each player, the competitors will privately hire henchmen, and spies and make purchases from Gamp the purveyor of the almost useless! When each has been through this the game will start. Play is as I have said not dissimilar to a standard adventure game, only you know that there are other players moving about in the scenes thwarting you. All the other player characters are inactive during the game turn of another player. Deals may be made off screen, but the instructions given by each player are secret. The effects will be made clear in the fullness of time when something terrible or sneaky happens.

The main criticism is that the player contact is minimal. Obviously in the presentation and limitation of the four player-one keyboard set up, only one player can be active at one time. This game would have been better suited to be saved until Spectrum networking is sorted out and accepted as the medium of multi-player games. I won't give anything away about the plot any further but suffice to say there are some characteristically mind boggling head benders of problems in it, as with a lot of games. Ploys only work if the computer understands you, so subtlety may not be the best approach — that's up to the players.

If you want to see what network adventure games will look like in the near future try it. In the present form, accept lots of thumb twiddling while you're waiting to play, and put aside quite a few hours — and for heavens sake write down your pass code. **CB**

Super power

Game *Superpower* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£5.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Cases Computer Simulations, 14 Langton Way, Blackheath, London SE3 7TL*

IN *SUPERPOWER* each player takes on the role of an intelligence agency. Your goal is to protect and expand your country's influence and assets in a group of Third World countries, at the expense of the other players, or in the solo version, against the computer. You may play with up to six players.

Having stated your pass word, your total budget allocation is shown. The actions open to you are broadly split into two areas. Information includes access to other players' interests, details of the countries' assets, defence spending, police strength, and which other players have a stake in them.

The other major group is Decisions, which include investment (increasing your stake in a country), which involves bribing the countries politicians; foreign policy, a polite way of describing meddling; taxes and spending, influencing the countries allocation of their resources; arms and advisors, helping to equip their armed forces; funding opposition parties, to undermine the present form of government. The ultimate aim is overthrowing governments, by ballot, coup or assassination.

The potential scope of the game is massive, and the more players the better. Backstabbing and undermining a player's most profitable assets are par for the course. There are so many different things to do that you never have enough resources to cover all your options, as well as defending and attacking. Data is constantly updated — a news bulletin comes up at the end of each whole turn, showing where investment has been made, and if any of the player originated events have taken place, or whether random computer generated disasters or good fortunes occur. Nothing is more frustrating than an oil strike in a country you have neglected.

As with any multi-player game, you have to sit out away from screen view whilst the others take their turn. It does speed up quite quickly if you know what you are doing.

Tactics generally should be to try to totally control two or three of the countries, and to dabble in the others to disrupt and frustrate. Caution must be exercised, particularly in a democracy, because if another player helps the opposition party to gain power, he can tell them to nationalise your assets, regardless of how much you have invested. One party states are hard to crack; they are often strong in detection, having large police forces and being adequately served by reasonable armed forces. Dictatorships are prone to assassination attempts but are costly and invariably attacks are doomed to failure.

This game is most decidedly the sort of thing to involve yourself in if you love *Diplomacy*, *Machiavelli*, or the like. Give full rein to your most paranoid feelings, it hardly ever pays to be benevolent. Don't trust anything or anyone. The key is to invest, defend your investment, and when you think it safe, attack, undermine and be as unpredictable as you possibly can be.



I liked this game very much. It's got simple mechanics, and is a nicely presented challenge for a group of schemers — or just the one of you! **CB**

Solomon

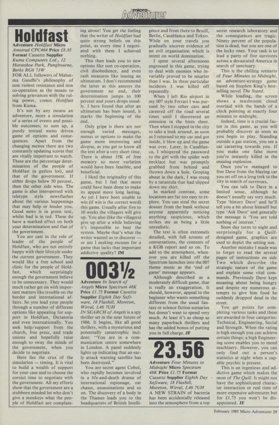
Adventure *The Search for King Solomon's Mines* **Micro** *Commodore 64* **Price** *£9.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Severn Software, 15 High Street, Lydney, Glos., GL15 5DP*

THE TITLE of this game tells you all you need to know about the scenario — it is a 'stagger round the jungle till you stumble on the treasure' adventure. It is a reasonable puzzle, which is essentially logical though pretty easy for any seasoned adventurer, with no particularly esoteric commands or actions.

In some cases the actual wording is a little odd (as in 'GO BRIDGE') but no odder than any conventional two word command game.

This may be a result of the size of the game. The solution has a respectable 102 steps, which is a reasonble challenge, but nearly all locations are illustrated with instantaneous three quarter screen graphics. Whilst these are attractive one junglescape looks very much like another one and I found them of little importance in playing the game. I would rather they had been smaller and used less and the structure of the game been more testing, with more variety, choice and problem solving. This is compensated for to some extent by the occasional real time action, but typing speed should not really be the deciding factor in an intellectual puzzle.

There are two parts to the game, the second only being playable on completion of part one, giving a total game of over 80K. If you want a novice adventure which is visually pleasant and no too demanding, then it is value for money. Remember however to use the 'LIST' command, which lists the items at a given place, as on some occasions it is the only way to discover what you are meant to do next. **NW**



Holdfast

Adventure *Holdfast* **Micro** *Amstrad CPC464* **Price** *£8.95* **Format** Cassette **Supplier** *Kuma Computers Ltd., 12 Horseshoe Park, Pangbourne, Berks RG8 7JW*

FOR ALL followers of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non violent resistance and non co-operation as the means to solving grievances with the ruling power, comes *Holdfast* from Kuma.

It's not by any means an adventure, more a simulation of a series of events and possible outcomes; to sum up, a purely textual menu driven game of options and consequences. Apart from the changing menus there are two constantly updating scores that are vitally important to watch. These are the percentage determination of the people of Holdfast (a gutless lot), and that of the government. If either drops below 50 percent, then the other side wins. The game is also interspersed with teletype style newsflashes about the various happenings that may help or hinder you. Good news is in green text, whilst bad is in red. These do have a marked effect on both your determination and that of the government.

You are cast in the role of leader of the people of Holdfast, who are not entirely happy with their lifestyle under the current government. They would like a free school and clinic for the people of Holdfast, which surprisingly enough the government believe to be unnecessary. They would much rather get on with important matters like trouble on the border and international affairs. So you lead your people through a number of different options like appealing for support in Holdfast, Dictatoria and even internationally. You seek help/support from the church, free press, and trade unions and hopefully raise enough to sway the minds of the government, when you decide to negotiate.

Here lies the crux of the simulation — timing. It is vital to build a wealth of support for your case and to choose the correct time to negotiate with the government. All my efforts show that the government are a stubborn minded lot who don't give a monkeys what the people of Holdfast are complaining about! You get the feeling that the writer of *Holdfast* had quite strong beliefs on this point, as every time I negotiated with them I achieved nothing.

This then leads you to new options like non co-operation, civil disobedience, and even rash measures like issuing an ultimatum. I don't recommend the latter as this annoys the government no end, their determination jumps to 100 percent and yours drops usually. I have found that after an ultimatum has been issued, it marks the beginning of the end.

Only gripe is there are not enough varied messages, menus or options to make the game more interesting and diverse, as you get to know all the text after a very short time. There is about 15K of free memory so more variation would have been feasible, and beneficial.

I liked the originality of this game, but I feel that more could have been done to make its appeal more long lasting. As yet I have been unable to win (if win is the correct word) this game. Usually after five to 10 weeks the villagers will give up. You also (like the villagers) give up after a while believing it's impossible to beat the system. Maybe that's what the writer wanted us to discover — or am I making excuses for a game that lacks that important addictive quality? **IM**

003½

Adventure *In Search of Angels* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£1.75* **Format** Cassette **Supplier** *Eighth Day Software, 18 Flaxhill, Moreton, Wirral, L46 7UH*

IN SEARCH of Angels is a spy thriller set in the near future of 1986. It begins, like all good thrillers, with a mysterious and potentially catastrophic incident: "You are in a communication centre somewhere in London. A panel suddenly lights up indicating that an early attack warning satellite has been destroyed."

You are secret agent Cobol, who rapidly becomes involved in a life-and-death drama of international espionage, car chases, assassinations and so on. The discovery of a body in the Thames leads you to the headquarters of British Intelligence and from there to Brazil, Berlin, Casablanca and Tokyo. While on your travels you gradually uncover evidence of an evil organisation which is intent on world domination.

I spent several afternoons engrossed in this game, trying to deal with enemies who invariably proved to be smarter than I was. In three particular incidents I was killed off repeatedly.

When I left Rio airport in my 007 style Ferrari I was pursued by two other cars and careered off the road several times until I discovered an omission in the hints sheet. Then when I stopped in the city to take a look around, as soon as I returned to my car and got inside, it blew up and the game was over. Later, in Casablanca, I whispered the password to the girl with the spider web necklace but was promptly grabbed from behind and thrown down a hole. Groping about in the dark, I was stung by a tarantula that had slipped down my shirt.

In marked contrast, some locations are far too easy to explore. You can steal the secret dossier from the bank without anyone apparently noticing anything suspicious, which strikes me as being a little unrealistic.

The text is often extremely detailed, with full screens of conversations, the contents of a KGB report and so on. To add to the atmosphere, whenever you are killed off the Spectrum launches into the 007 theme music as the 'end of game' message appears.

Although described as a moderately difficult game, that is really an exaggeration. It should, however, appeal to the beginner who wants something different from the usual fantasy or science fiction scenarios but doesn't want to spend very much. At least it's as cheap as many paperback thrillers and has the added bonus of putting you in full charge. **JF**

23.56

Adventure *Four Minutes to Midnight* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£1.75* **Format** Cassette **Supplier** *Eighth Day Software, 18 Flaxhill, Moreton, Wirral, L46 7UH*

A NEW STRAIN of bacteria has been accidentally released into the atmosphere from a top secret research laboratory and the consequences are tragic. Ninety percent of the population is dead, but you are one of the lucky ones. Your task is to lead a party of five survivors across a devastated America in search of sanctuary.

This is the chilling scenario of *Four Minutes to Midnight*, an adventure-strategy game based on Stephen King's best-selling novel *The Stand*.

While loading, the screen shows a mushroom cloud overlaid with the hands of a clock pointing at exactly four minutes to midnight.

Indeed, time is a crucial factor in this game, as you will probably discover as soon as you begin to play. Standing outside a gas station, you see a car careering towards you. If you make one false move you're instantly killed in the ensuing explosion.

Once you've managed to free Dave from the blazing car you set off on a long trek to the city in search of survivors.

You can talk to Dave in a limited sense, although he doesn't usually say very much. Type 'history Dave' and he'll tell you a bit about himself but type 'Ask Dave' and generally the message is 'You are told nothing of interest.'

Soon day turns to night and surprisingly for a *Quill*-designed game, graphics are used to depict the setting sun.

Another mistake I made was to forget to read the several pages of instructions on side Two which describe the strategic nature of the game and explain some vital commands. Previously Dave kept moaning about being hungry and despite my numerous attempts to give him food he suddenly dropped dead in the street.

You get points for completing various tasks and these are awarded in four categories: Technical, Engineering, Social and Strength. When the rating is high enough you can achieve certain things; a high Engineering score enables you to mend machinery. However, you can only find out a person's statistics at night when a capable psychic is present.

This is an ingenious and addictive game which makes the most of *The Quill*. It might not have the sophisticated character interaction or real time of more expensive adventures but for £1.75 you won't be disappointed. **JF**



Micro army

Game *Warzone* **Micro** *Spectrum 48K* **Price** *£5.95* **Format** *Cassette* **Supplier** *Cases Computer Simulations, 14 Langton Way, Blackheath, London SE3 7TL*

WARZONE is very much a link between conventional abstract boardgames and computer wargame simulations. This solo game features very crisp graphics and a clear, understandable uncluttered screen. The player may choose to construct his army from infantry, tanks and artillery, picking 15-50 of each; the computer will allocate itself a mirror image (as far as I could make out). Having done this the game may begin.

The map is made up of 10 sectors with 100 boxes, gridded and referenced; this gives a total map area of 1,000 boxes. There are four types of terrain — normal, hills, road and forests. The latter are generally the best terrain for infantry and hiding your artillery. There are minefields liberally dotted around, which have the irritating habit of flashing continuously in red and yellow for some obscure reason.

Tanks and artillery may move/fire or fire/move, and infantry may only be used for close combat. Movement is carried out by entering the coordinates of the box preceded by M, then using the compass directions shown on the screen to move the appropriate distance. Deductions for terrain are automatic, infantry oddly suffering virtually no penalties. Moving off a road regardless of how many more movement points you have left means the end of that unit's turn!

Firing is also easy. You enter the grid references of the firing unit prefixed by an F, and then the coordinates of the target. A simple hit or miss result is flashed up, and if the target is able to fire back it will.

Close assault takes place when you contact an enemy unit. Again win or lose is flashed up, with seemingly no real criteria applied. Not even having supporting units helps.

Firing, hand to hand combat and air attacks (the latter you may launch at one target at the end of your turn) appear to be a complete lottery.

The irritating aspects are moving large numbers of troops from one sector to another. By moving one out into the next, you leave the first sector, and then the computer requires you to enter the original sector's number to go back to move the next unit!

The computer's troops never accidentally move onto a minefield, neither do they move off the map (if the player moves one off the map area the unit is lost).

The computer instinctively knows your weak points, whilst the player can never look into a sector where he has no troops. You cannot fire from one sector to the next, although you can melee across a sector border.

In conclusion, *Warzone* is a nice simple game, relying on graphics rather than anything else to make you want to play it. The display on the screen tells you almost everything you need to know. The sector display, compass and a total of your remaining troops are always on screen to help you play, once you've learnt the few key commands.

I would have preferred the option to play against a live player as well as the computer, as the latter's tactics are limited. Otherwise I recommend this abstract simulation. **CB**

Acornsoft adventures

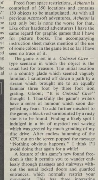
***Andy Mitchell** looks through the latest offerings from Acornsoft — Acheton, Quondam, Spooky Manor and City of the Seventh Star*

THOSE PUNDITS spreading rumours concerning the demise of text-only adventures have received a serious body blow from the latest Acornsoft releases. A batch of games conjured up by a host of new writers has reaffirmed the text adventure is alive and well and bubbling in the Beeb.

Those adventurers who are familiar with the early Peter Killworth games such as *Castle of Riddles* and *Philosopher's Quest* can now test their skills with a new generation of games which include among them larger data bases, more humour, nastier Puzzles and educational packages.

Like many new floppy disc owners, I have been impatiently waiting for someone to produce a disc based game which would be as large as the original mainframe games. Rumours of the *Acheton* game slowly filtered through from Acornsoft and this has at last materialised. In addition I have long felt that the Beeb's excellent sound channels have been silent too long in the depths of my dungeon. This default, plus the addition of a large injection of humour, has finally been rectified by *The Seventh Star*. For those "Tricky Dicky's" who scoff at the perils of standard adventures, *Quondam* has arrived to wipe the sneer from their faces. Billed as a game for Advanced Adventurers, the problems and convolutions it contains will challenge the ingenuity and stamina of the best wizard. Finally, *Spooky Manor*, a game for children aged seven and upwards, designed to amuse and educate, completes this bag of games.

At long last the adventure game on the Beeb has come of age. "Space, the final frontier" has been conquered — memory space that is! For too long adventure game writers have struggled to compress a full sized game into the 32K available. The recent decrease in floppy disc prices, and resultant rise in disc users, has convinced Acornsoft that a large enough market exists to make a disc based adventure a commercial proposition. By holding the large amounts of data required for a full sized game on disc, where it can be instantaneously available, adventures can now be as large as the writer's imagination.



Acheton

Acheton comes as a two disc package. The first disc holds the program file which is loaded into the memory and which then prompts the user to insert the Data disc into the drive. As the game proceeds the data disc is accessed for suitable room descriptions and any other messages. There is also an option to reconfigure the disc files to an 80 track format for those users with double density drives.

Freed from space restrictions, *Acheton* is comprised of 350 locations and contains 150 objects to be manipulated. As with all previous Acornsoft adventures, *Acheton* is text only but is none the worse for that. Like other hardened adventurers I have the same regard for graphic games that I have for picture books. The accompanying instruction sheet makes mention of the use of some colour in the game but so far I have seen no trace of it.

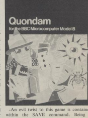
The game is set in a *Colossal Cave* — type scenario in which the object is the usual lust for treasure. The initial location is a country glade which seemed vaguely familiar. I sauntered off down a path by a stream which brought me to an equally familiar three foot by three foot iron grating. Gloom; "It is *Colossal Cave*" thought I. Thankfully the game's writers have a sense of humour which soon dispelled my fears. To add further mischief to the game, a black rod surmounted by a rusty star is to be found. Finding a likely spot I indulged in a bit of mystical rod waving which was greeted by much grinding of my disc drive. After endless humming of the CPU out on the screen popped the message "Nothing obvious happens." I think I'll avoid doing that again for a while!

A feature of this game's new found freedom is that it permits you to wander endlessly through passages and stairways without the usual locked doors and guarded entrances, which normally restrict your movement. This has three interesting results, the first being that you very quickly get lost! The second is that you don't as quickly encounter the usual frustrations of the blocked doorway which can cause you to abandon the game in despair. The final feature is one of bewilderment. In smaller games the problems are obvious, if not the solutions. In this game it is not always easy to recognise a problem when you see it. I have found many interesting sounding rooms, but as there is no obvious problem associated with them, I tend to wander off down the inviting tunnels which lead ever onward.

As with all new Acornsoft adventures, the Hints and Answers envelope is provided with the game. Unlike previous games, *Acheton* holds the answers on disc and by typing *HELP with an associated number, the solutions can be obtained. As this game is obviously a mine of fun, I have decided to resist the temptation to peek and with luck I'll still be tramping the corridors for some time to come.

Quondam

The Hint and Answers envelope provided with this game lasted one hour, before I ripped it apart with my teeth! The innocent box containing the adventure informs you that it is a game suitable for advanced adventurers — I am obviously not advanced! I have a suspicion that the word should be "masochistic" adventurers. Unlike *Acheton*, *Quondam* contains an endless variety of nasty endings for the unwary. Don't bother looking for problems in this game, they will find you.



An evil twist to this game is contained within the SAVE command. Being a cautious reviewer I attempted to SAVE my position prior to entering a suspicious room. A quick flash of light and a pall of smoke revealed a legal looking gentleman who informed me that he did not like the way I was using the SAVE command and as



such I had better desist! I ignored him of course and repeated SAVE. This clever move on my part resulted in a very painful experience with two gentlemen wearing dark glasses and Knuckledusters! Having found that saving is not as simple as it used to be, and as death and disfigurement await my every foolish move, I very quickly became dispirited.

The scenario of this game is yet again traditional caves, dragons, knights in armour — and the MAFIA! On start up, the first offering you are greeted with is a vast spider's web which must be traversed to find various magical items. The web, which is in fact a large maze, contains voracious spiders which are one step behind. One wrong move or hesitation will see you disappear under a flurry of hairy legs.

A hint I should mention to you is that, if a command worked, try it again and again! Some surprising results can be obtained in this way. Years of adventuring have conditioned my mind to assume that when I have given an apparently successful command I assume that I have solved the problem. Should any further problem remain it will require a different command. As the game's title sounded so mysterious, I consulted the dictionary for help with its origin. QUONDAM — "That once had but no longer has the specified character." If that explanation means as much to you as it did for me, you are in trouble!

I did not enjoy this game as frankly I found it too devious, but those who relish a series of really tricky puzzles need look no further.

Spooky Manor

For over 100 years the old manor house has been empty. It is said to be haunted and to contain hidden treasure. One day you set out with some friends to explore the house and solve the mystery. While you are looking around the house you hear the front door slam and you find you are shut inside the manor with night approaching.

Spooky Manor is an adventure for up to four players that encourages planning and logical thinking. The game provides stimulus for discussion and decision making and although it can be played competitively the advantages of co-operation quickly become apparent.

Educationalists see adventure games as useful aids in the teaching of English, for in many cases they are simply exciting comprehension exercises. In addition pupils are forced to extend their vocabulary to find the command recognised by the program. How often have you struggled to find an alternative to SMASH DOOR!

The screen layout is broken into four separate text windows, each one dedicated to a different player. By prefixing commands by your player number (one to four), the computer responds in the appropriate window with the result of your action. The players may separate and explore the Manor alone but some problems can only be solved with the co-operation of other players. The co-operation aspect injects some realism into the game but additionally makes it more awkward for single players. To aid youger players, the comprehensive instruction booklet gives a list of recognised commands, and more importantly detailed maps. Children are easily confused by the standard compass headings given in adventures so the combination of a detailed map and the game's compass directions should give some valuable training in this basic skill.

I am surprised that a game written expressly for younger players does not have novelties included such as Sound and Colour. I appreciate that sound in a classroom situation can be distracting but the inclusion of a sound select key would have solved that problem. No doubt the game has some worthy educational aspects but some very simple additions could lift it up the excitement scale quite easily. I suspect this game may be rather tame for home consumption but in a school setting I'm sure it would prove very popular.

The Seventh Star

Travelling back to Earth from your starbase in a distant nebula you run into a violent magnetostorm. You survive but your ship is badly damaged and you are millions of miles off course. You have no option but to crash-land on the nearest planet and salvage what you can to help you to find a way back to Earth.

This game has the two ingredients which instantly lift it out of the ordinary. The first and most important is the humour which pervades the messages. Villainous names such as Mr Blobov Slime, (but you can call me Blob!) appear to hinder and harry you. The game calls upon a wealth of characters from science fiction films and books. Within my first hour familiar figures from *Star Wars*, *Hitch-Hiker* and *James Bond* appeared to raise a smile of recognition. Along with the ubiquitous Box of Matches and Empty Bucket, a talkative micro called Mu-Mu is to be found, which is supposed to help you should you type HELP. Unfortunately it all too soon runs out of battery power and goes silent — makes a change from the flickering torch I suppose!

When I cold-heartedly, commanded "SMASH OLD LADY" the game responded, "You wouldn't want to hurt an old lady would you?" Being an evil swine I replied "YES", which received the reply "Smart Alec". An author who can anticipate the wicked mind of adventurers like this gets my vote.

The second ingredient is the addition of sound — and about time too! Various sound affects are scattered throughout the game, all of which are amusing, if not always realistic. The Beeb can produce some great noise (and as in this game, grate noises too). Together with a scattering of coloured text, both effects go far towards brightening up the standard text game.

ACORNSOFT GAMES

The Seventh Star

for the BBC Microcomputer Model B

At an early point, your full name is requested and this is used in various places to personalise the game. After congratulating myself for cleverly outwitting the opposition and gaining entry to a guarded room, it was an amusing shock to find a morgue slab with a reserved ticket inscribed with my name. An uneasy feeling begins to grow that perhaps you are not being as clever as you think! This game has that spark of fun, combined with relatively easy puzzles which appealed to me and kept me battling on towards that final puzzle whose solution would whisk me back to Earth.

As with *Acheton*, this game can be interrogated with a *HELP command. Should you find you are stuck, the computer will give you a number which can be used to index the Hint and Answer envelope. This technique should reduce the chances of you accidently seeing too much in the solution sheet which always seems to happen unless you let a friend do the looking!

Taken together, this latest batch of games can do nothing but enlarge Acornsoft's prestige and keep their BBC adventures at the forefront of the software market. □

You are in a well-lit room, an emporium of some sort. Is this the place of which the old man spoke? For there, on the shelf in front of you, is the object of your quest, the fabled tome wherein the greatest products of the imagination can be found. You have the magic one pound note in your hand. You know what you must do.

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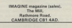
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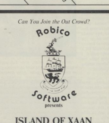
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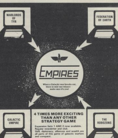
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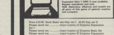
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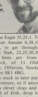
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ADVENTURE HELP







WE'RE WELL INTO an adventuring 1985 now, and I hope you are all set for another thrilling year — if it is half as exciting as 1984, we're in for a vintage one!

But straight into the Help:

Rather than mentioning adventurers by name, I'm going to concentrate on the games, and the first up is the newest Scott Adams title, *Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle*. I had trouble myself in starting this one, but remembering Adams'weird sense of humour (and prompted by Gary Radburn, gee thanks Gaz!), it eventually permeated my thick skull that the Seed Spell might be a Sesame seed... casting this opened the drawbridge of course! But, before you venture into the Castle, try exploring the surrounding landscape, as you will find one of the required Stars at the very beginning of the adventure.

Later, to get the metal, 49,27,36,15 (*refer to list of words at end*) and to get rid of the rats, 11,29,41,3,19,42.

Twin Kingdom Valley rears its head repeatedly. I've mentioned it before, but as an update Ian McDougall writes with a couple of tips. First, to kill the witch in the castle, 32,13,38,20,43 and to kill the sand lurker, 4,9,30,38,47,12. Ian is stuck in Severn Software's *Mystery of Munroe Manor* — can anyone help him? Meanwhile, he offers help in *Urban Upstart, The Hobbit, TVK, Heroes of Karn* and Scott Adams' *Pirate Adventure*. Write (with a SSAE as usual) to 50 Drum Brae Drive, Edinburgh EH4 7DS.

Erik the Viking is the latest from Level 9, based on Terry Jones' book. One or two adventurers have written to me with problems, so here are some hints to help. To mend the Boat 2,39,17,34,28,26,16. Before killing the enchantress 44,8,22. To get the objects from the Eagle 35,25,1. To get the Silver Amulet 6,38,18,31. Finally, to get through the Granite Slab, 23,25,30,38,17. These hints are from Ste Pickford, of 11 Oldham Avenue, Offerton, Stockport, Cheshire SK1 4BG.

He is stuck in later parts of the adventure, so if anyone is being a clever clogs and near the end of *Erik*, drop him a line with your experiences.

Simon Allan has written a plaintive little plea: "I would be grateful for help in *Sphinx Adventure, Castle of Riddles* and *Philosopher's Quest* by Acornsoft. Also, any hints or tips for *Colossal Adventure* from Level 9". See if you can help him at Royal Russell School, Coombe Lane, Croydon CR9 5BX.

Finally, to Phipps' *Knight's Quest*. Scott Graham has a couple of questions concerning this adventure (incidentally, many thanks for your *Atic Atac* map!) — to get down into the Hot Vallet, Scott, just 51,45. As for rescuing the Princess, the method is quite involved, and you should actually get someone else to do it for you. Assuming you have found the princess safely, and are at present in her cell, you (or your *alter ego*) must 40,12.

1 MUTTON; 2 YOU; 3 THEN; 4 HITTING; 5 BEDPOST; 6 THROW; 7 RIVER; 8 UP; 9 HIM; 10 ACROSS; 11 CAST; 12 SWORD; 13 HER; 14 DIP; 15 LOFT; 16 PLANK; 17 HAMMER; 18 POLISHED; 19 FOLLOW; 20 SILVER; 21 LIQUID; 22 CHALICE; 23 HIT; 24 URGA;26 A; 27 CRATE; 28 AND; 29 LYCANTHROPE; 30 WITH; 31 STICK; 32 GIVE; 33 SWIM; 34 NAILS; 35 FEED; 36 FROM; 37 KEY; 38 THE; 39 NEED; 40 USE; 41 SPELL; 42 THEM; 43 DAGGER; 44 PICK; 45 ROPE; 46 IN; 47 BROAD; 48 EXAMINE; 49 THROW; 50 SWING; 51 LOWER.

ADVENTURE CONTACT

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Tower of Despair **Problem** How to open the Door of Destiny **Name** Mark Hassall **Address** 15 Kings Close, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 4EW.

MICRO Vic 20 **Adventure** Quest **Problem** How do I get past the blue, two headed serpent? **Name** Brian Reyes **Address** 34 Engineer Lane, Gibraltar.

MICRO Atari **Adventure** Enchanter (Infocom) **Problem** How do you open the pesky jewelled box with the tightly wrapped rope around it without using the Kuldad spell? **Name** S M Hindley **Address** Fern Hill, Fern Road, Cropwell Bishop, Nottingham NG12 3BW.

MICRO CBM64 **Adventure** Snowball **Problem** What is the code to the security door under the habidome? **Name** Steven Panting **Address** 2 Lavington Road, Worthing, West Sussex BN14 7SN.

MICRO BBC B **Adventure** Philosopher's Quest **Problem** Have done everything but find the dogs **Name** Peter Goldsack **Address** Ridgeway, Invergordon, Ross-shire IV18 0HF.

MICRO Atari **Adventure** Colossal Adventure **Problem** How to get past the flood by the sleeping dwarves, and how to get to the Princess in the tower, how to climb the unclimbable spire **Name** Neil Webb **Address** 66 Alderley, Little Digmoor, Skelmersdale, Lancs WN8 9LY.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Valkyrie 17 **Problem** What is the object in the powder room called, how do I use the shower, is there anything underwater? **Name** Michael Burberry **Address** 12b Trezela Road, Penalverne, Penzance, Cornwall TR18 2RU.

MICRO TI99/4a **Adventure** Return to Pirate's Island **Problem** How do I get fan blade under sea, and how do I get to isle in distance because I have run out of gas **Name** Ben Thurley **Address** 55 Beech Avenue, Bourne, Lincolnshire PE10 9RZ.

MICRO Spectrum 48K **Adventure** Lord of Time **Problem** How do you find your way through the hypercaust, how do you find the treasure in the pirate's chest? **Name** Stuart Millinship **Address** 17 Graveney Gardens, Arnold, Nottingham NG5 6QW.

HAVE YOU BEEN staring at the screen for days, or given up in disgust, stuck in an adventure whose problems seem insurmountable? Adventure Contact may be the answer. This column is designed to put adventurers in touch with one another. When you're stumped a fellow adventurer may be able to help — and you may be able to solve other people's problems. If you are having difficulties with an adventure, fill in this coupon and send it to Adventure Contact, Micro Adventurer, 12/13 Little Newport St, London WC2H 7PP. We will publish Adventure Contact entries each month in this special column.

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Commodore bookware

***Sally Glover** casts a critical eye over four recent Commodore adventures based on books — The Stainless Steel Rat, Rendezvous with Rama, Fahrenheit 451 and Macbeth*

THE GROWTH of the home computer market has brought many new words into the language. Inevitably the film and record industries have caught the bug too and now we see 'game of the film' or pop groups searching for another hit.

Now is the turn of the publishers and we must learn yet another computer derived term — 'Bookware'.

Before I get too cynical, however, I must mention that although many games have been hyped out of all proportion to their true merits, occasionally one turns up which restores one's faith. Still, let's take a look at four new titles for the Commodore and see how they measure up to our expectations.

Firstly, *The Stainless Steel Rat Saves the World* from Mosaic Publishing. At first sight the package seems good value — not least of all because it contains a copy of the Harry Harrison novel on which the program (by Shards Software) is based. My fiance — a long time fan of the author — urged me to read the book and within minutes I was engrossed in the light, tongue-in-cheek science fiction. As it turned out it was not necessary to read all of the book to play the game.

The theme of the game is, however, the same as that of the book — to save the world and your wife, Angelina, from the arch-villain, 'He', bent on the domination of Earth for all time.

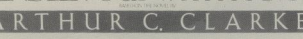
Now, regrettably, we must turn to the game itself . . .

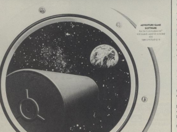
Attractively packaged, it claims to be an "illustrated text adventure" with a 200 word vocabulary.

However, I found the game a very poor apology for an adventure, completely ruined by the limited and cumbersome command analyser, and with a response time that should make the programmer blush with shame.

Having learned to play down to the game's level I attempted to find one of the many solutions to the program but finally gave up after relatively few 'time jumps' out of sheer boredom and frustration and carefully put the game — but not the book — where it belongs — in the bin!

It could be argued that I should have called Mosaic or Shards for some help or advice but, if an adventure game is well written, there should be no need to call the programmer for a word list! To me, as a relative newcomer to adventuring, there is nothing more annoying that knowing what you want to do and the program being too 'thick' to understand — even without having to wait up to half a minute for the command to be 'processed'. I would have been much happier to have forgone the spurious pictures and see a little more time spent on the command analyser.





Please don't be put off Mosaic products though — *Erik the Viking* was programmed for Mosaic by Level 9 and I've heard very good reports about it from many sources. On any other titles, though, I'd suggest you try before you buy.

New to the UK is a series of games from Trillium, an American company, for the Commodore 64 and Apple II. The adventures are distinguished by being written with the collaboration of some of the world's best known authors of fantasy and science fiction, such as Ray Bradbury, Michael Crichton, Alan Dean Foster and Arthur C. Clarke (who is reputed to have taken time off during the filming of '2010' to assist in writing a new ending for the game).

The two Trillium titles I was given to look at were *Rendezvous With Rama* and *Fahrenheit 451* and I'll deal with each of them in turn.

Rendezvous is packaged rather like a half-size double LP containing the two game discs.

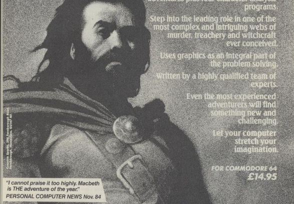
The front cover sports an attractive photograph of the Earth and the artefact *Rama*, and the rear cover a synopsis of the game, together with a quote from Clarke's 1953 tale *The City and the Stars*, predicting the interactive computer adventure.

The cover unfolds in two parts to reveal two pieces of dazzling artwork, the first depicting a view of Rama from the bridge of

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the spaceship 'Endeavour' and the second a breathtaking view of the inside of the artefact itself.

The lavish support material details how to communicate with the game and lists some of the verbs and nouns understood by the full sentence/multiple command analyser. *The Commander's Handbook* is backed up by blueprints of *Rama* and the survey craft *Endeavour*. To complete the package is a separate hint sheet — just in case.

In the game you play Captain Norton of the survey ship *Endeavour*, with the brief of exploring *Rama* before its unavoidable collision with the Sun.

The adventure has very good, quickly-drawn graphics although purists can turn them off if they wish.

The analyser is very friendly and I was soon in the main part of the adventure — the artefact itself — without needing the hint sheet.

There are two small arcade type sequences as you dock with *Rama* which, although simple, seem to fit in and, unlike in *Eureka* for example, add to the game rather than detract from it.

After docking, I've done little beyond getting inside the 50 x 20 km cylinder and I'm sure the main problems are yet to come. I won't say more except that if you miss *Rama* you'll be missing a bargain.

In the original *Fahrenheit 451* Ray Bradbury envisaged a world ravaged by war against an undefined enemy and where 'firemen' police the Government's ruling that all books must be incinerated.

Guy Montag is a fireman who comes to see that this destruction of man's literary heritage is wrong and by his rebellion becomes the country's most wanted 'criminal'.

In the game you take the part of Guy in what is essentially a sequel to the novel where you must seek out your allies — the 'Underground' who 'save' books by committing them to memory. To hamper your task you are constantly pursued by the Robot Hounds who can still sense the traces of kerosene ingrained in your skin from your years as a fireman.

The game is set around New York's Fifth Avenue as you seek out your hidden friends and learn the codewords to help you pass deeper into the Underground, evade the Hounds and develop a new identity before you finally rescue the country's books.

There is little to add about the command analyser which is the same as in *Rama* but I did prefer the graphics in *Fahrenheit 451*. The documentation is, again, splendid and a clue sheet for some of the codewords is included in the package. The only drawback with both adventures is not in the games themselves but in the pathetically slow Commodore disc drive — once you're into the game the waits aren't that long though, so don't be too discouraged.

Finally, some 'heavy stuff' — *Macbeth — The Computer Adventure*.

With so much high quality American software being transposed from the superb Atari and Apple machines and so many poor and mediocre domestic programs it is a rare treat to see an outstanding, innovative British game. *Macbeth* IS such a game and, I believe, an absolute must for any serious Commodore adventurer.

Macbeth is a play of enormous scope with much of the action taking place away from the stage. All the elements of an epic are there, including mass battles, murder, witchcraft and ghosts. The team of people working on *Macbeth* (the adventure) have obviously spared no effort in turning as much of Shakespeare's work as possible into four connected adventures which feature effects in sound and graphics I've never seen before on a Commodore 64.

The space available here is much too small to give a detailed breakdown of the game so I'll limit things to what you get and a brief synopsis of each of the games.

The bulk of the game's documentation consists of a 174 page book containing a copy of the play (in plain English) and a veritable wealth of background material in the form of maps, family trees and commentaries on the play and its major characters.

Most of you will breathe a sigh of relief when I say it's not essential to read all of this before playing but having the book alongside you during play to 'dip into' will be invaluable.

A much smaller booklet gives you all the information you need to load and interact with the games as well as a description of what you need to achieve it complete with scenario.

Each of the four games is entirely different.

The first adventure casts you as Macbeth himself pledged to defend Scotland against its enemies and destined to "save her twice". The completion of this adventure will allow you to gain and decode a Runic manuscript.

The skirling bagpipes and the brilliantly animated opening scenes of the witches on the heath are a taste of the note of quality that runs through *Macbeth*, and the graphics of the first game help to ease you through the relatively simple, if bloodthirsty, beginning of the adventure.

In part two you are Lady Macbeth, preparing for the arrival of King Duncan to stay overnight chez toi.

You have no plans for his departure though — except into the next world — as you plot his murder under your castle roof. This adventure, seemingly the most difficult of the four, gives you one hour of real time to make and execute your plan and escape detection.

The third game is a truly amazing experience — a real graphical adventure. No text, no descriptions and normal movement commands don't work. You MUST look at the picture and then decide what should or can be done.

The picture drawing is among the fastest I've seen and the quality can only be described as excellent. The command analyser too is extremely tolerant and very fast. I persuaded my fiancé to look at this part of the game and we were both soon absorbed in examining the scenes and stretching our imaginations and vocabularies to the limit. I had to forcibly remove him before I could move on to . . .

Adventure four, the climax of the game and the only place you can get killed. You as Macbeth must survive the siege of your castle. Time is of the essence again as you strive to secure the castle against fire and foe whilst avoiding a final confrontation with Macduff.

I'm told that completing all four adventures gives you a real treat but I'm sure it will be a long time before anyone — certainly me — reaches that happy state.

Macbeth is superb — a programming tour de force. You will find something in it whatever your preferences and, with the arrival of the Trillium games for the disc owner, Bookware for the Commodore 64 at least has added a new, rewarding dimension to adventure gaming. ☐



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THE CAMBRIDGE AWARD WINNERS

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Whatever your choice the 1984 Cambridge Award competition has the game for you.

THE PRINCE, an adventure game, won the **Cambridge Award** and is an entirely new concept in adventure games, creating a believable world of medieval intrigue and counter-intrigue in which the four players become totally immersed. The game is very interactive and each player represents a particular 'power base' within the castle. The players need to make alliances with each other before the mystery is solved and become the new Lore-Master. Untrustworthy henchmen are recruited to spy or steal from other players, plots are hatched and unholy alliances formed. **Price £7.95**

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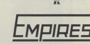


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Telephone: 01-858 0763



COMPETITION CORNER

Tony Roberts tests your skill — send your answers to Competition Corner, Micro Adventurer, 12-13 Little Newport St, London WC2H 7PP



10 copies of Imperial Software's Empires for the Spectrum 48K to be won

Be my Valentine

YOU'RE REALLY DOING WELL in your quest to regain all 26 of the fabled, magical runic rings for your captor, the very large black dragon Tisch. In fact, you're exactly half way through — after finding the M Ring this month, that is. Only another 14 to go — and as this is our February issue, it's fitting that the problem revolves around these 21 Valentine boxes (St Valentine's Day being February the 14th — but then, you don't have much way of telling the time in the dark hole you're kept in).

The M Ring has been hidden in one of these boxes. The others, of course, contain the usual assortment of venemous spiders, angry trolls, magazine editors, and so on. Which box is the odd one out?

The prize this month is a little different. Imperial Software have offered us 10 copies of *Empires*, a space exploration and conquest game for up to three players and an umpire. That means that while there may be only 10 winners, at least 40 people can share in the prize! If you want to know more about *Empires*, look at the review on page 12.

The tie breaker is simple — write down as many English words of four or more letters as you can make from Valentine.

All entries must be received by the last working day in March, and the winners will be named in the April issue. If you don't want to cut up your magazine, you can send in a photocopy. Either way, mark on the diagram which of the boxes is the odd one out, and then say why.

Duplicate entries will be disqualified. Don't forget to tell us your name and address.

And now we come to the winners of the December competition.

If you remember, the problem involved finding your way through a monster infested maze, picking up and getting rid of useless tokens; the objective was to exit with as few tokens as possible.

The least number we managed to have at the end was two — but a number of our readers managed to get rid of all of them.

There were 40 pieces of software from Hill MacGibbon to be given away, so we haven't got space for the names of all the winners — but the five best entries were from V Hughes of Co. Antrim, Matthew Backhouse of Fareham, Ian Taylor of Newcastle, Gillian Hodds of P Burnhope, and Chris Whitehouse of London.

They and the other winners will be receiving their prizes within the next month.

That's all for this competition — good luck with the search for the odd box out!

